

White Album 2 - Story 04 - The Idol Who Forgot How to Sing

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White Album 2 Omake/Story04/Prologue

She had planned on entering university from the start.

That spring, having gone through several obstacles and managing to make it into Houjou University, there were some new guys in the social sciences class she was in. Taken away by her idol-like presence, her beauty, her charms, and her atmosphere, she had a bright future ahead of her in university life.

Amongst those who were aware of the "*legend*" of the attached school's festival... that spring, the guys that ushered her in as a junior had eyes on her, and gossip built up around approaching her with delight.

And then, amongst those who came up with her from the attached school... her former classmates who once again took the same lessons with her. Though they prayed for luck from the gods, they had remembered a bit of how a year ago, she was so sociable and had a smile on her face, like that of an idol.

Wasn't there someone who she was going out with...?

"*Her*" name was Ogiiso Setsuna.

Having won the Miss Houjou School title three years in a row, to the several hundreds of people, she was a "*legendary diva*".

White Album 2 Omake/Story04/Chapter 1

"I-I'm sorry, I'm in a hurry right now."

"Don't say that now~, give it another thought would you, Ogiso-chan?"

With the students finally having been released from their responsibilities for the day, a clamor fell upon the classroom that had just finished its fourth lecture.

Within that atmosphere, Setsuna tried to push her way out of the classroom, but a single male student managed to keep her from getting away.

"But there's only a week before the Houjou Festival..."

"Just one song, okay? We'll figure it out if we practice two or three times!"

"I'm not so skilled as to finish in such a short period of time, you know."

This stubborn man was always trying to invite her. Though he tilted his head to the side a bit, he kept showing her such a vivid expression on his face.

... the truth was, she was in a hurry to catch a view of "*him*" from behind as he was leaving the classroom just ahead of her. However, she didn't reveal her intent at all.

"It's okay, we'll figure out what you'll be singing."

"No, actually this is a bit of a hassle, sorry..."

And again, she gave a soft expression waving both her hands lightly, with a pose that said, "*I respectfully decline*".

It'd been about half a year since she entered university, but Setsuna had almost always given this expression.

Which is to say, guys would give her countless reasons every time in various places. However, if there was one thing to add, during the half year she was here, they had never shown their "*true character*".

"Look, what about the "*WHITE ALBUM*" you sang at the school festival last year?"

"Eh...?"

However, as soon as he said that...

Setsuna's voice would break, as if her usually gentle voice and attitude had cracked.

"Even *"SOUND OF DESTINY"*. We can play either of them right away."

"....."

"To tell you the truth, I saw that stage performance. We immediately left the food stall we were at and headed straight for the school."

"I-Is that so...?"

And, it was as if the man was in a daze, not having noticed the girl in front of him had her voice and her fuzzy expression break up just even a little bit.

"... well, personally speaking, I really want you to be singing that song."

"That song.....?"

"You know, the last one at the school festival. The original one, called..."

"That's...!"

Which was why at that instant, it was as if he hadn't noticed the sound of the cracks from the mask that she was wearing...

"All right~ enough of that~"

"Wha...!?"

"Ah..."

"Senpai, you're gonna piss off being so friendly to a girl you haven't even met, you know?"

"I-I don't want you telling me that, Iizuka!"

"Right, right, we get it, we get it. I figured pretty much exactly the same thing."

"... I don't want you saying that either, Iio."

But at that instant, thanks to two familiar people who barged their way in, he hadn't noticed how she had changed at the last minute.

"I'm sorry for always causing you trouble, Takeya-kun, Iio."

A few minutes later, they were at a sidewalk cafe table close to the social sciences section. Right off the bat, Setsuna had been grateful to her two friends for stopping him, or rather, her own chaos.

"You're quite popular as always. Though I'm not exactly envious of that."

While sipping her ice coffee, Mizusawa Io gave a light apology like she always did with Setsuna.

That way she had with her blunt, yet beautiful words hadn't changed from when she was in the attached school. She'd put guys with good looks to shame in an instant.

"This is the fifth time now. Offers are finally coming in from half of the participating bands."

Dropping milk into his black tea, Iizuka Takeya gave her a different expression than what he would usually give other girls. It was obvious it again added a hint of praise to the legend of Ogiso Setsuna.

He had a slender body that put females to shame, and light-brown hair. Infamously known for his womanizing tactics, he'd improved quite a bit since coming from the attached school.

"... really, what is with all that?"

To Setsuna, who was well known regardless of her year or gender, these two were part of the smallest, yet most important community of "*four*".

"As always, the Miss-Houjou-Three-Year-Streak signboard hasn't withered away one bit. Of course, that includes yourself."

"She's the original Miss Houjou, so she's got another year under her belt... if you go in, anyway."

"Someone like me can't go..."

"Setsuna, that's your ego talking."

"Eh? Ah, umm... well, I meant that I don't really have any reason to..."

"Well, in that case I can tolerate that."

"Don't make fun of her, Io. Well, even if her modesty ignored the sarcasm from other girls, it'd be because Setsuna-chan is half-serious about it. It's far too problematic."

"U-Umm... though I do think that Takeya-kun also does it just as much."

Even after entering university, it was as if the two hadn't known Setsuna's popularity had dwindled, so they couldn't help but tease her.

Around the time they enrolled, various clubs would be persistent in visiting during the classrooms for student orientation. Within only a few days of her student life, her name would roar amongst their members.

And after Golden Week when the noise settled down a bit, the days came where the executive committee would frequently visit every day asking for her to join the preliminary rounds of the Miss Houjou Contest in June.

And after a brief period when she finally managed to escape that, out came the bands participating in the outdoor summer live performance, competing for her role as a vocalist in their groups.

And now, with the university festival live performance only a week away, the battleground had transformed into a war of solicitation.

... and at the same time, the final, lackluster selection for the Miss Houjou Contest was explained away by "*Ogiso Setsuna's declaration of non-participation*".

"Well~ Setsuna's not one to hate girls. A world of difference with a certain junior around here."

"Speaking of which, what're you gonna do with the Taisho Romance Tea House? The girls still haven't given up it seems... on the "*two of you*", that is."

To begin with, everyone in the program had noticed the genre that shop had taken, what the girl(s) achieved in last year's school festival, as well as how big the thing would be.

"At any rate, they're pretty firm at preventing misunderstandings. A world of difference from the band members leading around female vocalists."

"And you yourself happen to be so much better than them, huh? That's cool!"

"The ones who happened to do this twice in a row now are the band members, right?"

"Ahaha, the two of you are just like always. Makes me a bit relieved."

Setsuna giggled with a smile at how blunt the two were with one another. One couldn't think of it as a conversation between a man and a woman.

That expression of hers was far different from the face she had at the classroom, displaying a sense of comfort in her mind.

Setsuna should have been able to connect with others in this way since leaving the attached school and entering university, but these two were the only ones she'd show this face to.

Yes, even if you include her family...

"I'm the same as always... nothing will really ever change. Nothing will change."

"....."

"....."

... which was why, they were the only two who'd bear witness to this gloomy tone of hers.

"D-Did you know? He's started a new part-time job."

"... is that so?"

"This time he's a cram school tutor. And it's for people headed into Houjou University."

Takeya changed the topic in a way it felt rather sudden.

"Eh, if it's for regular exams at Houjou University

here

I definitely wouldn't take that."

"Geez, going for such difficult stuff, even if it's a part-time job."

"I wonder why he likes going through so much trouble? Besides, it's just being attentive during classes, taking your time and preparing yourself, isn't it?"

But, for Io, it wasn't a change of topic at all. She knew she had to follow up, regardless of whether it was Takeya.

"That's why recently, he leaves right after the lectures. He's always getting into the classrooms quicker than other students."

"I see, really... just like Haruki-kun."

The two of them didn't see the relieved look on Setsuna's face, because they knew she was eager to hear about "*him*".

"How many jobs does he have going? There's the family restaurant, and the convenience store, right?"

"Including the internet cafe, that makes four. Seems like he'll go late into the night."

"And then he goes through lectures, reports, and exams in all subjects without missing an inch... when the hell does he sleep?"

"I'm telling you, he's so busy with this crap it's insane. Of course it's not really to avoid Setsuna-chan, you kn..."

"I know. I already know that much..."

"Setsuna..."

That was because she had been desperately trying to follow behind him as he hurried out of the classroom.

"Have you talked to him recently?"

"No, not for the past month."

"Not even phone calls? Texts? Haruki doesn't do any of that either?"

"No... that's not it, it's just that there's no way the two of us would be."

For two people in the same social sciences department being in first year, they should be able to do texts and phone calls, and if they were really wanted, they could be talking to each other every day when they meet.

Having said that, Setsuna couldn't even touch Haruki's cellphone number. And even if she sat beside him, or tried to talk to him, she honestly couldn't tell how that would develop at all.

"But then you two won't move ahead at all, Setsuna. Are you fine with being like this?"

"That's..."

"They can't move that soon. Even you should know that, Io."

Half a year ago...

She was a girl who was only an idol in appearance yet mischievous with her family. Haruki should have been a class president who was so direct with people. And yet, he had hurt her.

"Then how about you give up chasing after him?"

"...!"

"Okay now, that's not how you should..."

"He's supposed to be a man of sincerity, so what value does Haruki have in being someone who threw it away...?"

His betrayal, as a friend, as her friend... and as a friend of a girl who isn't here, was very unforgivable.

Even so...

"It's my fault."

"Setsuna!"

Setsuna wouldn't blame Haruki like Io and Takeya did.

"I was the one who chased after Haruki-kun. I pushed away Kazusa."

And she hadn't forgotten about the girl who wasn't here.

"I've split those two apart."

And, she couldn't even forgive herself.

Though she grieved that nothing had changed, she couldn't forget.

Even now, Setsuna prowled through a labyrinth that she had no hope of escaping. Perhaps for an eternity.

"But thank you guys, for worrying about a timid girl like myself."

"Well... we're best friends, right?"

"Right?"

"Thank you..."

In actuality, the kindness they had was a little painful.

Because the truth was, there was only one person Setsuna had promised to be best friends with.

Up until last year, Takeya and Io both took her in alone from "*the group of three*".

But they could be with her like this, even if they were wrapped up in Setsuna's pride.

They could be with her like this, even if now two people had disappeared from her "*group of three*".

"You're the only ones I have."

To Setsuna, they were beyond friends.

"W-Well, I'm happy you say that but, you should really go and make more friends."

"Yeah, it's a nightmare to have just Io as the only female friend of yours. I worry that maybe one day, you'll catch that wicked tongue of hers."

And because they were beyond friends, they knew.

"You have a really good personality, see... it's such a waste to see you continue to be passive like this."

"Though I worry you'll catch her way of smiling during a conversation while casually kicking at people from under the table."

They knew that the Setsuna now wasn't happy.

They knew that they had to be there to support her now.

"If you would, you know, open your heart up... you could find more friends you could smile seriously with, or get into arguments with, right?"

"Yeah, yeah, there's plenty of girls who would get along well with you, Setsuna-chan..."

"Someone like me can't."

And...

"Everyone would just hate someone like me..."

"..."

They knew that no matter how much they tried, they wouldn't be able to help Setsuna regain her smile.

"What does everyone see in me, anyway?"

"They just put on a smile, not really revealing what it is they really mean."

"They're lying cowards who can't even seriously smile or get angry."

"It's as if they're businessmen or something."

Setsuna had changed.

She had become enveloped in sorrow, six months ago, in the snow at that airport.

"If it was gonna be like this, maybe I shouldn't have performed on stage..."

"Setsuna..."

It was an unfortunate incident to Setsuna.

It was an unfortunate incident to the people around Setsuna.

"I shouldn't have gone up to the rooftop..."

"That's not..."

Even so, to Setsuna...

"I shouldn't have ever listened to WHITE ALBUM..."

"..."

Because of that incident, she had instantly lost her beauty.

Setsuna had changed.

She'd have a sad expression that would sometimes leak out. And it was largely felt not just by the man, Takeya, but also by her classmate, Io. And it seemed as if they'd be enveloped in it.

As she was now, the young girl who was like an idol was no longer there. She'd been swapped with a woman that acted like an actress, couldn't control herself,

and was at the whim of others.

And if those who didn't know of Setsuna's true nature ever came nearby...

Indeed, that would be the real reason why Setsuna paid more attention to her surroundings far more than when she was at the attached school. She would bury herself so as to not stand out.

"I'm home..."

"You're back. Isn't it quite late?"

Opening the living door room, Setsuna would hear the carefree voice of her young brother Takahiro. He was playing a fighting game with familiar, flashy sound effects that greeted her for a while.

Since the new year started, in just a two month rush, Takahiro had managed to get a D grade and slip into the School of Houjou University with his effort and skill. But ever since entering, he'd just been fooling around like always.

"Where's Mom? Already asleep?"

"Yeah. I think she went to her room..."

"I see, then I'll go head into the bath..."

"Setsuna."

"... ah..."

In that brief moment she was relieved by Takahiro's words, her mother appeared in pajamas along with her father, suddenly revealing themselves from within the dark kitchen.

That gaze of theirs had a sense of worry, reproach, and relief. It was what Setsuna feared before arriving home, not being able to endure even a bit of it...

"You're home much later than you should be."

"Just a bit. It's been a while since I went drinking with Io and Takeya-kun."

"Oh, so you were with them then. Then..."

Her mother's relieved expression wasn't toward Setsuna, but to the one behind her.

Though it seemed like she was trying to relieve someone else far more than she

was trying to relieve herself...

"Wait right there, Setsuna."

"Dear..."

In the end, that goal of hers didn't work out, and Setsuna's father gave her a stern look as he always did.

"I did call home, didn't I? I did say I didn't need dinner, didn't I?"

As if to repel that gaze of his, Setsuna began explaining herself before he asked any questions.

Which is to say, there was an error in her ways...

"What time is it now?"

"... twelve thirty..."

In other words, she'd clearly known that the day had already changed.

"When you called your mother, you said that you were coming home at nine, yes?"

"I planned to come home as soon as I was done eating, but for some reason the conversation got lively... then, we went for a drink and..."

That excuse of hers wasn't a lie or anything.

After the lecture had ended, she'd gone from the university's sidewalk cafe to the family restaurant, and from there Io had invited her to a bar, and before she knew it the last train had gone for the night.

"You have to call us if anything changes. Everyone has been so worried."

"Well... I just kinda forgot, didn't I?"

That excuse of hers wasn't a lie or anything either.

Because, it'd been a while since everyone had fun. Almost to the point that everyone really lost track of time.

Probably Io and Takeya had both invited Setsuna because they were worried of how down she was.

But up until now, she'd come to believe that the two really enjoyed themselves in the several hours they spent together.

... because, it was no exaggeration that Setsuna felt the same way.

It should have been clear they all enjoyed themselves.

"I'll be careful next time. That's enough, right?"

"Wait right there, Setsuna. I'm not done talking."

"Good night!"

That wasn't to be. Setsuna wanted to end this no matter what.

And that was because she wanted to remain in this comfortable state of hers far more than the hate of this lecture she was being put through.

"Come on, Dad, you're so dull. Can't you take a guess?"

And, the moment Setsuna tried to end the conversation by running down the hallway, her younger brother began his cover fire.

"Going to drink with everyone is just a ruse. I'm pretty sure along the way those two snuck out and started making out."

"Takahiro!?"

But that was just in name. In fact, it was throwing a landmine for Setsuna to step on.

"Because you know... it's pretty obvious that both Mizusawa-san and Iizuka-san both don't mention his name."

"Mind your own business!"

"Sis, even you're hiding this particular important detail. What're you so shy about?"

As always, Takahiro didn't take his hands off the gamepad, probably not even half-aware of what it was he was talking about.

Even so, Setsuna lost her composure in an instant. She was so disturbed she was grinding her teeth at the irresponsible suggestion coming from him.

"Is this true, Setsuna?"

"That's..."

It couldn't be.

Because she hadn't talked with him at all in the past month.

"I'd think Kitahara-kun's quite level-headed when it comes to that sort of thing."

"I'm telling you, that's..."

A lie. There was no way she would blame Haruki.

He wasn't even level-headed one bit.

He wouldn't even ask that they spend time together alone...

"I hadn't seen him recently so I can't really tell, but seems he changed a bit when he entered university."

"~~!"

Only that particular detail wasn't a lie or anything.

He had changed...

Haruki had changed.

"Taking a girl around his age late at night like this..."

"..... kun."

"What?"

"I told Haruki-kun not to call home at all."

It was because he had changed... along with Setsuna.

"He said he was worried so he'd call but, I was sure Dad would answer so..."

"Setsuna, what do you mean by..."

"Dad! I'm already a university student! I can't believe I have to get permission from my parents just to come home late at night!"

— — What on earth am I doing?

Really, what on earth am I doing here...?

"What do you mean by that? Isn't it normal?"

"It's not! I've asked other girls, and they haven't had parents who were this annoying, you know?"

"That's their life, and we have ours."

"I don't understand what you're saying! You say it's normal, but it doesn't make sense when compared to the others! So what do you call normal, then!?"

— — *There's really no meaning to this.*

I don't have any reason to oppose my father. I don't have any reason to be stubborn like this.

"Setsuna! That arguing of yours is only getting away from the main point..."

"Anyways!"

"Wha..."

"We're adults now, so we can take care of ourselves!"

— — *Besides, it's a lie.*

There's no way that the two of us could be alone together right now.

"Umm, is that what you call adults dating one another?"

At some point, Takahiro had stepped away from his game and looked in with a disturbed face.

"That's right! So what's wrong about that? We're not fooling around, we're serious about this, so there's no reason to be worried or even against it!"

"... umm, when you say that so clearly, it's kinda hard for me to respond as a younger brother..."

— — *Why do they believe me?*

It's just random things I'm spouting, of an impossible "dream".

It's a delusion that I created half a year ago, being disobedient when I shouldn't be."

Why, why do they believe me...!?

"I was having so much fun coming home and now it's all for nothing... I'm going into the bath!"

"W-Wait a second, Setsuna..."

She was at her limit.

Setsuna hastily turned her back and ran to the bathroom, protecting her image as a selfish and unreasonable girl.

"Oh~ boy, she's really pissed off now..."

The sound of her anger echoed down the hallway, and with the violent thud of

the bathroom door, the people of the Ogiso residence were called back to reality.

"Well, she got tied up in a lot of strings for a year too... shouldn't you be more prepared, Dad?"

"For what!?"

"....."

The father had a discouraged, yet desolate look on his face. The younger brother could only sigh with a bitter smile.

"Mom, what's wrong? You've been spacing out a bit."

"Ah, it's nothing. Nothing at all."

And, the mother who'd been following Setsuna's expressions in silence...

"It's nothing... I'll leave it at that."

She'd been still measuring the meaning of the tears that almost escaped Setsuna's eyes.

".... a, aha, ahahaha..."

Throwing herself in a cold shower as if to freeze her mind and her body, Setsuna's gloomy thoughts were released within that noise.

Only hatred towards herself ran through her head.

Hatred of how her enjoyment had been all for nothing.

Hatred of how composed she was with lying even to her family.

And, hatred of the lies themselves.

Lies protecting her own identity, which came at the cost of hurting herself as she was right now.

"... ahaha... ahahahaha...!"

Setsuna had returned to the Setsuna from a year ago.

That "*Ogiso Setsuna*", who was always in the center of everyone, who was always alone.

"I'm a liar... I'm such a liar!"

No, a tiny bit had changed from a year ago.

Because right now, Setsuna couldn't bear with her past self, losing her heart little by little as it was cut up and wounded.

One week later...

"What do you mean?"

"I'm telling you, it's such an impossible mistake that it's that impossibly important."

"... seems quite impossible."

The tension was suddenly so furious as Setsuna woke up and took a phone call from the first thing in the morning. Her words were so desperate, they didn't quite get to the point.

"OurThe social sciences' Taisho Romance Tea House was left unprepared even this morning, so we can't even guarantee opening by ten!"

"... what time is it now?"

"It's already past six."

"What minute?"

"Fifteen past."

"What second?"

"... are you awake?" "Fuaahh..."

Today was the first day of the Houjou Festival.

Classes were on hold for the duration of the university's festivities, and Setsuna had been planning to stay in a warm futon in this cold morning. Her mind hadn't awoken yet, and her body was shivering all over, so even she gave such a vague response that didn't quite get across.

"Anyways, that's how it is, so I'm pulling some strings here. Using whatever I've got. Or rather, a call to all hands."

"I see."

"Well certainly, we're exempting a certain someone within our group, but if it's for personal reasons and depending on the circumstances, we may have to

summon them by force."

"... I see..."

"No objections from anyone who's planning to sleep at home until noon."

"..... haah..."

"Don't sulk and sigh like that. You think I want to call you like this right now?"

"I'm sorry, you're doing great, Io. But serving customers isn't what I..."

"I know. We both don't want to revisit that nightmare."

They referred to the school festival from last year. As the two VIPs in their class, they went through hell on the first and second days of the festival. Cosplaying in this kind of shop made them think far too much about what kind of looks they'd get, and from what kind of people. They just hated it.

"We're behind the scenes, in the kitchen, working on pastries! You're great at that too, right, Setsuna? As our role model, we're begging you..."

"If that's all it is... then, it can't be helped."

"Thank you Setsuna! I'm in your debt!"

A while ago, friends of hers in her university program would go through lengths to make these kinds of requests. Despite their high confidence, she'd send them away in disappointment. This time was different though, and Setsuna accepted despite her reservations.

"But I'm not serving any customers, okay?"

"I know that."

"No surprises, okay?"

"I swear to the gods. You won't even be cosplaying!"

"... all right, what time should I come?"

"Those cooking will start around nine I think, so meet up in front of Building 6."

"All right. I'll see you later then."

"We'll be waiting~"

"..... haah..."

Hanging up on that restless and busy phone call, Setsuna once again sulked with a sigh.

Certainly she was annoyed with being unreasonably called early in the morning on a holiday. However, the suffocating feeling of the bustling festival she was

being called to was something she lamented far more.

To be honest, she didn't even want to spend a day at the university festival.

Because, she could imagine.

She could imagine meeting overly familiar people who'd been openly trying to talk to her, within that bright, busy and free atmosphere.

Bumping into anybody from the bands or groups would be quite awkward, considering she refused them saying, *"I have plans that day..."*

And that school festival... or rather, that university festival would bring up various memories.

Memories that were dream-like, as well as nightmarish...

"Well, then."

Cutting down those painful memories, Setsuna woke up once again, and looked at the time.

And, confirming she had about three hours to spare, she slowly rolled out of bed, and opened the door to first start on making breakfast...

"....."

Once she put her hand to her head and pondered, she hastily ran through her dresser.

Three hours later...

"What do you mean?"

"I'm telling you, it's such an impossible mistake that they just impossibly disbanded the whole thing."

"Io!"

Meeting up right at 9:30, Io's first words were rather calm and composed, but clearly the point didn't get across.

If Setsuna had to summarize what happened, somehow the whole deal about not being prepared enough to open at ten was an exaggeration that Io heard from the others. In actuality, the staff actually said something along the lines of,

"It'd be nice if we had one or two people helping".

And since the help was needed was nothing more than Io and perhaps one other person, their search for other members had ended now.

"Really~ I'm sorry, Setsuna. Anyways, you've been dismissed. Good work."

"....."

"Don't give me such a scary face. I apologized, didn't I?"

It's not that Setsuna was angry at her for messing up in such a horrendous way anyway.

It's just that, she couldn't believe in this convenient excuse of hers.

Because after all...

"Hey! What the hell's the meaning of this, Takeya!?"

"Now~ now~ don't get angry, Haruki. Be glad we didn't get in any trouble."

In the end, she wasn't the only one who was involved in this misunderstanding that these two had came up with.

"That's not the problem, you lied to me..."

"I didn't, I didn't I'm telling you! It was just a really bad misunderstanding!"

"Who's going to believe that crap...!?"

She heard a nostalgic voice from behind her.

A voice of someone who would calmly argue with others, even if the person were a teacher.

A voice of someone who, despite complaining, wouldn't refuse any kind of request.

A voice of someone who, despite being shy and turning away, would directly convey their feelings.

"...!"

Because after all, Setsuna wasn't able to turn around for some time.

"... I'm sorry, Setsuna. But this had to be done."

"... eh...?"

And, Io whispered right by Setsuna's ear so that the man behind her wouldn't

hear.

"Even you should know a day like this is a double-edged sword."

"Io..."

Setsuna stared straight back at Io, who was looking at her.

Or more accurately, the image of herself reflected in Io's eyes.

"However, right now it's a path you have to take. You can't return back to the way things are if you run away or keep being this way."

And Setsuna's expression was that of great anxiety, unease, loneliness, and fear.

"... try taking a gamble on this, would you?"

"...!"

And, a glimmer of hope...

"Well, that's how it is, so you two can do whatever you two want."

"That's right, you don't have any kind of odd job planned right now, and you could go back home and go to bed."

"Of course, since you did come here, you could take a walk around here. It is a school festival that runs once a year, you know?"

"Ah, today they're doing an outdoor live performance, at the main assembly hall."

Takeya and Io slowly slipped behind both Setsuna and Haruki into Building 6 to escape.

Their combination in this kind of suspicious operation was a success.

... though it was similar to the two "*here*", they didn't have quite a history that they could be proud of.

"Anyway, we'll leave the rest to you two. Let's go, Io."

"Yeah, right... well then, see you Setsuna, Haruki."

"Ah..."

"Hey..."

And then, the two "*here*" were helpless, being left behind in front of the school building.

"....."

"....."

Only two remained from the group of four, and the moment the noise had settled down, they had realized that this wasn't a place for just them, but that of an open area.

As the place would open to the general public in about thirty minutes, the students were in a rush with preparations heading in and out. Everyone was avoiding the two as they passed through the entrance.

"It's, been a while."

"Y-Yeah..."

"....."

"....."

The man who always preached about *"never troubling others"* and the woman who tried to bring an atmosphere of *"not wanting to stand out"* remained there for a bit of time. Passersby who were curious gave them glances that were annoying.

And for about ten minutes, the two had wasted time, slowly walking through the campus that was uplifted by all the clamor.

"It's really been a while."

"Yeah..."

Proof of that came from the fact that the two hadn't been exchanging any words for the last ten minutes.

"....."

Because it wasn't that Setsuna wasn't saying anything.

It was because she was trying hard to get a glimpse of his face from the side.

"....."

However, there were also things that he shouldn't be doing either.

Proof of that came from him averting his eyes if they met, and then when he

came to look at her again, he had a shameful look on his face.

"Are you doing okay... Haruki-kun?"

"Yeah, well... I'm alright."

The name of the person next to her is Kitahara Haruki.

About a year ago they'd known each other. About a year ago they'd known their feelings for one another. About half a year ago they'd pass by one another, and about half a year ago, they'd separated...

However, he was still special to Setsuna, even now.

"I heard you've been doing lots of part-time jobs. You're not pushing yourself, are you?"

"Well, not really... I've been coming to university every day."

"I see... well, I guess that's true."

Even though Setsuna would give such a harmless, stereotypical answer, she'd think it over and over and over.

Because, *"it had been a while"*.

Despite taking the same lectures together, they haven't even been greeting each other.

"....."

She'd always wanted to talk to him.

Because she'd always try to go after him when leaving the classroom.

"....."

However, it was expected that their conversation would suddenly take a pause like this.

And because she knew it'd be this way, she'd stop running after him as she was chasing him.

"Ah..."

"....."

Even though the last eleven minutes had been useless, they'd been prompted to take action at the last moment.

Walking through a campus they were familiar with, if they took the usual path they did, they'd eventually reach a place they'd have to pass by.

The main gate, covered in signs of various colors.

If they took a step forward from here, they'd return to their usual days.

The usual days after classes where nothing would happen between the two of them, and nothing would begin.

"Umm... well, I'll be..."

"Umm!"

But today wasn't any kind of day after classes.

This day couldn't be left the same way as yesterday.

"What'll you be doing, after this...?"

"Ah, well..."

Because there were 364 days to say things like *"I'll leave it to tomorrow"* or *"I'll leave it to next year"*.

"It's the university festival, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is."

Setsuna finally got things started, looking straight at Haruki.

And, what she saw was anxiety, unease, loneliness, fear...

In the end, the exact same feelings that she had been carrying.

So, Setsuna gripped her hands tightly behind her back.

"U-Umm... I know Takeya-kun and I were like that but..."

"Setsuna, do you..."

"Eh?"

"Do you really have nothing to do at all?"

— — *What about you, Haruki-kun...?*

You're busy with part-time jobs, right?

You don't have time to be dilly-dallying in a university festival like this, right..?

"..... no, I'm free."

She'd long forgotten the kindness that she naturally gave Haruki a year ago.

However, she knew how she'd treat him.

"I... see..."

"Yup, that's right."

She only needed to keep him from making excuses.

In particular, as she cared for him, she had to make clear the consequences of him doing so.

"Then, then, you know..."

"Yup..."

"It's a school festival, isn't it?"

"We're in the middle of a festival, aren't we?"

See, just like that.

"Then, where do you want to go? I heard somebody famous was going to show up on the first day."

"I'm hungry. I didn't get any breakfast this morning."

The simulation had ended long ago.

An operation that was put together two hours ago, going as planned.

"Do you want to eat candy apples?"

"I'm fine with ramen."

To an extent, Setsuna had noticed when she got a phone call from Io.

She noticed her vagueness, her play on words, and how she cared for her.

She'd been given this conviction that Io would bring along Haruki.

"Eating ramen at this time would be bad, wouldn't it?"

"I know."

Which was why she took her time with the clothes she picked.

It wasn't anything flashy or plain.

It was something to avoid catching other people's attention.

"... it was also bad last year, wasn't it?"

"... it was, yeah."

But, she wanted him to say it was *"pretty"*.

Because, troubled as she was, she'd done her best picking out these clothes and accessories...

"What toppings you want, miss? I can put on sesame, red pickled ginger or cut garlic!"

"Ah, it's okay... this is fine."

"Come on, you've got nothing to lose, throw in some garlic! It'll really bring out the flavor!"

"Hey, Asai, what's with suggesting garlic to a girl in the morning?"

"A-Ahaha..."

They'd entered a ramen shop that had been just opened by the Wandervogel club. The store clerk there had a strong build, and with customers building up he'd call out to with such a vigorous voice that it surprised them. It wasn't something one could call being comfortable.

But to Setsuna, not being that comfortable was comfortable.

It was just perfect, being worried about other things without the two of them being able to concentrate on one another.

Just as Haruki admirably pointed out, their order didn't take three minutes before arriving. Somehow, the ramen's flavor from the university festival wasn't anything to talk about.

At first, the two would take a bite, and look at each other with a bitter smile.

But, it would seem that they didn't seem as tense about things falling apart today. This atmosphere of them eating in silence was warm, just like the steam coming from the ramen.

"Okay~ welcome everyone! The famous Wandervogel Ramen Shop is open for business~!"

"You can take your seats right now, how about mister? Ah, then see you later~!"

As always, the giant's roaring treated the customers with little hospitality.

And within that noise, Setsuna had been at ease, having little regard for her conduct or her words. Sitting beside him as they ate ramen, drank their soup, and then...

"... what is it?"

"Ah, well... it's nothing."

There was nothing wrong with his gaze.

"You've got my attention, just go ahead and say it."

Because the soup didn't warm up just their bodies, but their feelings as well.

Because although it was a single step, their stamina had been brought up.

"Well, I think it might be rude if I told you directly."

"Ah, perhaps you mean... this?"

"Yeah... I was thinking it's been the same like always."

When Setsuna noticed that Haruki was looking a little past her face, she moved her left hand in an instant.

And, her hair behind her back sprung up.

"That's how you eat ramen, you know."

"How you eat it...? Oh, you mean keeping your hair behind you?"

"Yeah, umm... but it's not like you're going to hold it with your hand the whole time."

"It'd be simple enough to tie it up. But I'd look pretty ugly if I did that."

"Really?"

"Because, my hair already has two knots, you know? If I put another one, I'm not sure what that'd look like."

"Is that really a big deal...?"

"It is a big deal. If I had straight hair like Touma-san, then it'd still look cute even if I tied it up."

"But you're cute, Setsuna."

"Eh...!?"

"Ah, well... it's because you're always worrying so hard about those kinds

of details, it's so middle class-ish that it's cute."

"I'm not sure if I should take that as a compliment or an insult."

"S-Sorry..."

"... well, whatever meaning it is, it doesn't matter since I'm happy."

"S-Setsuna..."

"Heheh... now, eat up, eat up! It'll get soggy if you don't hurry!"

Even that time started off with a *"thoughtless and rude"* thing.

"This habit of mine won't change that easily."

"I see."

Even that time, it was in a ramen shop at the school festival.

The two had formally become lovers, and that happened to be their first, big day.

"Nothing'll change in just a year..."

"... I see..."

"Yup, that's right."

Haruki again fell into silence, hearing Setsuna fret as such.

However, that silence was not from feeling unpleasant, but rather being at ease.

Because they understood that the Haruki of now could accept the Setsuna of now.

Because they understood that it wasn't important for their conversation to continue.

Which was why, as if satisfied with this comfortable silence, Setsuna slowly sipped up the last of her soup... and then realizing that she took too much salt and calories in the morning, she became flustered.

Haruki was a bit flabbergasted with her reaction, and then he smiled a little.

Setsuna also smiled, holding back the pain in the back of her nose.

"Here you go, Haruki-kun. I got two extras."

"Takoyaki..."

"Yup, they smelled so nice I just kinda picked them up."

"... you don't regret eating up all the ramen from just now?"

"Sure, which is why I'm fine with two. You can have the rest."

"Hey wait, just wait a moment... I also ate ramen with you just now, didn't I?"

"But I can't really eat any more than this..."

"Then what were you thinking getting extras?"

"Eh...? But isn't it a good thing?"

"Do something about that worn-out housewife sense of yours..."

And then the events that followed for several hours until the sun set...

Setsuna couldn't clearly remember it all.

"C-Class E's haunted house was really scary..."

"Sorry Setsuna, I think that was probably my fault."

"I see... so you were responsible for making sure everyone would look so menacing, Haruki-kun."

"Ah, well, umm..."

"Nothing less from a former class president. Even when you dropped out of it, you still have quite a bit of influence, yup."

"I'm telling you, that's not it... they're attacking head-on like this for a different reason..."

"UUUGHOOOAAAAA~!"

"Kyaaaaahhh~! I'm scared, Haruki-kun!!"

"S-Setsuna...!?"

"Uuughoo~, flirting with Ogiso-san in a public place like this~!"

"Gukaaa~, and even calling her Setsuna~, you traitorrrrr~!"

"You zombies shouldn't attack me with feelings~! You guys are supposed to be dead~!"

Even though she wished to spend time like this.

Even though she wished to spend time with him.

"S-Setsuna... do you really plan on going to the Taisho Romance Tea House?"

"Eh~? But today's the last day! Haruki-kun, even you didn't come to my

class, you know?"

"Well look, remember the first day just before it opened..."

"Io should be in today too! Don't fool around and let's go!"

"Uh, the one fooling around is..."

"... hey! Woah... there's still a line, even though it's the last day!"

"Hey! Isn't it foolish to be lining up for you won class? I'm telling you..."

"It'll be fine, as long as we talk for a bit it won't be boring to wait. Come on, let's go!"

"Wait! Please think about my safety being with these guys in line~!"

And despite that, Setsuna's memories, consciousness, and her experience today were all mixed in with her past memories, as if held captive up in the clouds.

"Let's check the store for social sciences! Takeya-kun and Io should be there!"

"No, let's stay out of that one."

"Why?"

"You know Setsuna, you'll always be like that no matter what."

"Like that... like what?"

"Like how people see you, and like making sure no one misunderstands you, or something."

"I'm aware of that, though?"

"Really?"

"Yup, I'm rather too conscious of it. I do watch how other people look at me."

"Then you should be aware even now... if the two of us should show up there, you know?"

"It'll cause a misunderstanding?"

"Eh?"

"....."

"Setsuna..."

"No, it's nothing."

Her past was mixed with her present, her dreams with her reality, and her recollections with her hope.

Those times, places, and scattered details devoured Setsuna from within one after another, stirring her feelings.

"The gates will be closing soon..."

"Eh, really?"

"Yeah, it's 6:45 PM."

"I see, there's no event tonight for today's festival, is there?"

"Well, it is the first day."

"No folk dance either..."

"... yeah..."

"I see... I see..."

"Setsuna..."

"....."

"J-Just want to ask..."

"Hmm?"

"Umm... do you want me to walk you home?"

"... eh...?"

"Ah, well... could you let me send you? Please."

"Haruki-kun..."

"Ah, well, umm..."

"....."

"Sorry, forget what I said just..."

"Hey..."

"Hmm?"

"Could we... cool off for a bit?"

The day came to a close before they knew it.

Night had fallen.

"Ow!"

"What's wrong?"

"... something stepped on my foot."

"Ah, sorry, the last time I did folk dancing was back in elementary..."

"No, it wasn't you, it was some other guy."

"Eh?"

"Look, we can dance where there isn't anyone else, right? Truth is my feet

have been stepped on plenty of times."

"... pff!"

"This isn't something to laugh about. And it's your fault."

"A-Ahaha... but you know..."

"I figured it'd be real noisy, but it's beyond what I expected... you're too popular, Setsuna."

"But Haruki-kun, you did promise to take this burden upon yourself, didn't you?"

"Well, sure. That's my privilege and responsibility... umm... as your boyfriend, I guess?"

"....."

"... could you not be silent when I say something that's embarrassing?"

"Ah, sorry... I was just savoring it..."

"Geez... Setsuna, your standards are real low..."

"Heheh... heheheheh..."

"Setsuna..."

"....."

"....."

"Hey..."

"Hmm?"

"Could we... cool off for a bit?"

"Yeah, let's go to a vending machine or something."

"No, over there by the tree is fine."

"But aren't you thirsty?"

"I am."

"Then..."

"But it's not my throat that's dry..."

"Eh..."

"It's my tongue..."

"... ah..."

"Being by the tree is nice..."

"Setsuna..."

"I don't want to be anywhere else but there..."

"..... okay, let's go."

First at the second music room, and then by the tree on campus...

The two had confirmed their feelings for one another on those nights of the school festival.

"Well now everyone, how was the first day of the Houjou Festival?"

"The executive committee announcement indicates that there were almost five hundred more in attendance compared to last year, which has set a new record..."

One could hear the sound of a radio personality from outside, which wasn't nearly as busy as it was during the day. The voice echoed in a dark classroom that was no longer of interest.

"By the way, our staff members had been real busy running around and recording the outdoor stage performance."

"I really wanted to see the Watos^[1] Troupe's performance! Someone just fill me in with your impressions of it!"

"... well, it can't be helped that I'm complaining about it, so listen to how things went with me bearing with only an onigiri since the morning... wait, I'm just complaining again! Well then, here's the next song..."

The voice would be that of the Houjou FM broadcast, coming from the only broadcasting office within Houjou University.

Even in today's age when it was simple to stream online to the world, Houjou FM didn't. The broadcast was owned by a group that was a little old-fashioned, going through the trouble of making sure only those within the university could listen. This closed nature and slightly old-fashioned programme was indeed popular amongst the students.

"You're not cold, Setsuna?"

"No, I'm fine."

While the radio broadcasted sounds of shouts and joy, the two both stared at different scenery outside.

A very dim light and the winds of the late fall came through the open window.

"It was fun, wasn't it?"

Holding down her hair from the cold winds that swayed it, Setsuna murmured those words from her heart.

She couldn't tell if those words were about today, or if they were about last year's festival. However, that murmur of hers came with a happiness that she hadn't shown recently.

"Yeah, it's beautiful, isn't it?"

And Haruki's answer echoed to show his satisfaction with Setsuna overflowing with such emotions.

It wasn't as great as last year, but certainly it showed optimism.

"We ate ramen, takoyaki, candy apples, crepes..."

"My stomach's still heavy."

"That was my first time to the manga club, but it was interesting. The drawings weren't that great though."

"But they were fine... being so extremely deformed, anyway."

"The flea market was fun. I really got lost so many times there, though."

"How much do you have to haggle with the stores, though?"

"I couldn't get to go to the Taisho Romance Tea House thanks to a certain someone."

"I'm begging you, at least imagine what kind of disaster would strike going there."

"Even so, even so...! It was really, really fun~!"

"Yeah... same for me."

"...!"

Unable to contain her excitement, she took a deep breath, as her gaze turned from the window towards the classroom inside...

And then, she gulped that breath down in an instant.

It wasn't because her expectations had been betrayed, but because they'd come to pass...

"It was fun, Setsuna."

"Haruki, kun..."

— — *Don't, don't don't...!*

The alarm bell that was Setsuna's heart violently rang.

Her eyes got used to the darkness before she knew it.

She remembered why she looked outside this whole time.

... it was because that expression Haruki had back then had been burned into her eyes.

"Really, thank you for today..."

That happy expression he had on his face.

That expression he hadn't shown for half a year.

... that expression he'd shown until winter had ended.

"I, I...!"

That's why she couldn't.

Because she'd easily wander away from this euphoria.

And become someone who would trouble Haruki, and make him suffer.

"I hadn't had such a fun day ever since entering university!"

"... eh...?"

Even though, she couldn't...

Even so, Setsuna couldn't stop the weeping that was mixed in with her own voice.

"It was fun... it was really, really fun today...!"

"Setsuna..."

The one moment that Setsuna feared had come to pass in an instant.

"Why, why are you..."

Setsuna's face became colored with feelings of guilt, regret, and sorrow.

"Why are you still saying something like that...?"

And probably, her own expression changed to be the same as his.

"Something like this shouldn't be such a big deal to you, Setsuna..."

"But Haruki-kun, you said *"thanks"*, you said it was fun..."

"I'm not talking about myself, I'm talking about you, Setsuna...!"

It was more than she had expected.

They got to talk a lot. They walked together. They smiled at one another.

She never thought it would go this well at all.

Which was why saying their farewells should have been enough at this point.

"Fussing over someone like me will bring you no good..."

"But that's just what I want to do. Don't decide that yourself."

However, she hadn't had a grasp on how greedy she'd become after things went so well.

"People in the program, and everyone else, whether they be guys or girls, they're all calling for you, Setsuna. They want to get along with you."

"So, what is it you want to say?"

"I'm telling you... if you just looked outside for a moment, you could find someone you could..."

"I can't do something like that."

"Why...?"

"Because I'm... I'm selfish, you know! I have high standards as a woman!"

"That's a lie... the real Setsuna would be far different from her appearance, being popular, family-oriented, a bit mischievous... but from the bottom of her heart, she'd be kind, and she'd come to like anyone..."

"That's, that's... something for only a special someone...!"

"Setsuna..."

She had to move forward.

"Like you said, Haruki-kun, everyone's been calling to me. Everyone's been inviting me."

Not having prepared or planned ahead, she had to go ahead and confront him.

"They wanted me to go into clubs, enter into the Miss Houjou contest, be a vocalist in a stage performance... it was so disgusting and annoying."

"They even invited me to the Miss Houjou contests... it was disgusting anyway, and quite annoying."

"But no one tried to know about my circumstances! They never gave it a single thought! No one tried to understand me!"

"...!"

"There hasn't been a single person who truly wanted to meddle in my problems..."

Which was why she now had to reveal her true self.

"I'm the one who they call *"that Ogiso Setsuna"*, you know?"

Reveal herself as a princess with high standards.

"A false idol that everyone brought up on their own, you know?"

Reveal herself as a troubling princess who, perhaps not having any value, one could see how difficult she truly was.

"No one would invite someone like me with any kind of purpose! No one would meddle in my affairs for any kind of real reason!"

And what this princess wanted was not a kiss from a prince.

What this princess truly wanted, was the scolding of a nobleman.

Scolding that was severe, and annoying.

And, lecturing that had sincerity in its words.

"Haruki-kun..."

"Setsuna, don't..."

Setsuna's left hand entangled itself with Haruki's right hand.

"I've hurt you so much, haven't I?"

One finger at a time, she met with his hand, and with that soft palm of hers wrapped around with his.

"I've left you alone like this for six months, haven't I?"

"You can make up for it... for the next six months."

And she continued again.

Setsuna's right hand, meeting with Haruki's left...

"And if I should lose to a moment of loneliness and go back, I might end up hurting you again, Setsuna."

"You won't know unless you try."

Within that darkness...

Setsuna's hot breaths, and the faint light that glittered in her eyes, reached Haruki.

"I'm not someone you should forgive, Setsuna."

"That's for me to decide!"

And then, with a firm determination, Setsuna took a step forward.

Bringing his hands to her chest.

Putting her forehead into Haruki's chest.

"Because, I, I...!"

—love you... even now, I still love you, Haruki-kun.

They came in contact with one another.

So all that was left was to let their hearts do the rest.

"Setsuna..."

"Haruki, kun..."

And surely, that was now only a matter of time.

Because the tearful-eyed Haruki couldn't leave the tearful-eyed Setsuna alone.

Comparing the sin of harming Setsuna now versus the sin of having once harmed Setsuna before...

And because he realized the foolishness of bringing about new sins.

"Setsuna, I, I... I...!"

"Haruki, ku..."

However...

"..... eh?"

"Why...!?"

The romance between a princess and a lowly servant...

That twisted and complicated line of fate...

Wasn't something that could be so simply resolved.

"And, today's final song... well, all of you should know about it I guess."

"Because actually, this isn't from today, but from last year's stage performance."

"And it isn't from the Houjou Festival, but from the attached school's festival...
an original song done performed by junior girls."

"The performance at the time was so amazing, stealing away even guests from the Houjou Festival and flooding the gymnasium. It's such a hot topic, even now, so..."

"The other day, I happened to get ahold of the sound source, so although it's been a year, this marks its revival!"

"This is the School of Houjou University's Light Music Club's song, *"The Love That Will Not Reach"*."

"Ah, ah...!"

"Setsuna...?"

Everything was rewinding backwards.

"Ah, ah, ah...!"

"...!"

Her embracing body had stiffened up, and she lost her grip on his hands...

And what remained was the real Setsuna; something that no one had ever seen.

The real Setsuna who had changed, whose expression was colored in despair, that even Haruki hadn't known about.

She only had a little further to go.

She should have carried out the feelings that she had held for so long.

Even so...

"The Love That Will Not Reach" echoed in the silence of the dark classroom.

But Setsuna didn't hear her own singing.

She didn't even hear Haruki's guitar.

She could only hear the melody that wrapped around those two, played gently and softly on the keyboard...

By someone named Touma Kazusa...

The wounds in Setsuna's heart throbbed with such pain.

1. [Jump up](#) ↑ Reference from [Tears To Tiara](#), the Watos Troupe is later mentioned in Izumi Chiaki's route

White Album 2 Omake/Story04/Chapter 2/All

"I think this place would be great for skiing!"

"Hey, let's go diving at Okinawa!"

"Swimming at Okinawa would be after April. It's impossible to do that during the spring, no?"

"Then what about at Guam or Saipan?"

"... you do know your seniors' budget here, don't you?"

"Hmm~, what a pain. Damned if you do, and damned if you don't..."

"That's why I'm telling you to just go with skiing."

"Hey, hey, where do you wanna go, Setsuna-chan?"

"Eh? What?"

"You know, where we're going for the seminar training camp... rather, that's why we gathered here, isn't it?"

"Ah, I'm sorry... umm..... let me think about it a bit more..."

Even today was filled with the clamor of adolescence, as the social science students gathered at the farthest table in the cafeteria of Building 6.

"But you know, why is it that we're the ones organizing even though we've never gone to a single seminar?"

"The seniors asked us because they're in their final exams though..."

"Even though we're in the same program?"

Outside was so gloomy it might snow, let alone cold and cloudy. However, the students' were so knee-deep in their conversation, as if the spring holidays had come and the winter had long passed.

"Generally though, the second years didn't get to come up until last year, so it's fine, right?"

"Well, it can't be helped this year. The seniors were all in a riot when the regional seminars were decided."

"... so then, it's like that?"

"So what we should look for is..."

"....."

"....."

Though, at that moment, when she realized that their conversation had come to a screeching halt, everyone had their eyes on her.

"Eh? Eh? Ah, yeah... well, what about going to an onsen?"

"....."

"....."

"S-Seems like what an old lady would do, no?"

"....."

"....."

"Eh? W-What...?"

And the moment she had such a hysterical reaction, being the girl whose fate was to always attract the attention of others...

"Ah~, forget it, I give up, I give up. Someone else do this."

"What's with that magnificently slow boke^[1] of yours? Was it on purpose? Well, was it?"

"Oh god, Setsuna really is so cute! I know she's right in front of me, and I know she rejected me long ago but I have to say it!"

"Wait right there! That's not something I'm going to let go of so easily!"

"It's okay, Setsuna. You don't need to hold back or be worried, just being here is fine."

"Yeah, yeah, that alone gets the seniors and professors going, compared to us."

Even though the evening sidewalk cafe had just regained its peace, the unforgiving noise from a while ago had completely returned.

"... sorry..."

But, they didn't know.

They didn't know that Setsuna's magnificent boke^[1] wasn't some calculated mischief of hers, even considering how naturally beautiful she was.

They didn't know that she was just concentrating on not hearing anything at all.

At least for this moment, as the sidewalk cafe speakers had been blasting "*The*

It'd been about two years since Setsuna enrolled in Houjou University...

A year had passed, and the famous song once concealed to hundreds of people had become a standard number to thousands during the winter.

"The Love That Will Not Reach" had its first broadcast on the Houjou campus during the school festival last year, in the evening. But even after that, the radio channel kept vigorously playing it. There wasn't a single soul within Houjou University who hadn't known of the song now, as there were those from the attached school who knew of it, and new listeners who were taken in by it.

However, as always, people around those who knew were on the offensive. And this didn't stop at recruiting to bands, entry requests into the Miss Houjou contest, or even confessions in all the chaos.

And as always, with Setsuna in the center of it all, she'd just give a vague smile while never actually getting into any of these.

Even so, if there was something that had changed in her even just a little...

"Well then, this makes up who's responsible for what. You heard that loud and clear, Setsuna?"

"I'll be fine. Contacting the seniors, right? Leave it to me."

It was how she could form friendships with people other than the *"group of four"*.

Stage performances, beauty pageants, and dates were off limits.

However, she'd be more likely to go to gatherings or tea ceremonies. Holding high hopes for herself, she wouldn't forget the faces of the organizers or students.

She was moderately close to people, moderately polite, not being haughty or vulgar, and she would never be emotional.

"The charm of a fleeting dream".

She'd polished up on this point of hers she'd gained since being in the attached

school.

But Setsuna had no idea if this was a progression or a regression of hers.

Because after all...

"By the way, Tomochika-kun... is Kitahara-kun going to be in this? Or not?"

"He was still a maybe on it since yesterday... maybe it's a tough choice for him?"

Like this, she'd hear how Haruki was doing through other people for the time.

Like this, she'd confirm how Haruki was doing through people other than herself.

It was a sign of the things Setsuna gained in a year, and what she lost in return.

"Besides, if Kitahara-kun never took control in the first place, we wouldn't be able to gather like this."

"Don't be pushing everything on Kitahara. He'll be in part-time jobs even when the spring holidays hit."

A little less than a year ago *"on the day"*, Setsuna had come to a halt.

She should have taken Haruki's hand, clung to his chest, and buried herself in all the lonely, painful, yet beautiful moments up until then.

She should have, but thanks to a single song that rode the airwaves, the overflowing emotions and courage that Setsuna built up had been snatched away.

"But you know, the main thing about being a student is..."

"Studying. Could you say he's neglecting his studies given his grades?"

"I'm telling you, that's not really the whole story..."

"Don't criticize us low-income students. Even I'm planning to do part-time jobs in the spring, but if you ask Haruki whether or not to pass on this..."

Since then, the two had grown emotionally distant, yet they were so physically close.

However, Setsuna mourned her failure so much that she blamed herself for the whole thing, not going the whole mile like she'd given up.

It was as if her heart had been finally sliced into pieces...

"... Tomochika, I've been always wondering about this, but why do you get so serious and cover for Kitahara like that?"

"What are you two up to...?"

"Oh yeah, you're both doing the same part-time job, right? Two of them, in fact?"

"... you guys are dating?"

"They're pals with similar tastes, and they both don't have an interest in girls... just maybe?"

It was around when winter just started, when Setsuna began making new friends. Perhaps it was to hide the loneliness of not being able to reach Haruki.

Perhaps it was an automatic balancing mechanism with Setsuna so that she could live on.

... but doing so would trap her in a vicious cycle of building up guilt for *"running away"* from Haruki.

"Ridiculous. You guys have no idea. Kitahara's quite popular with people out there."

"Eh~, really?"

"Besides, some girl forcibly approached him in his last job..."

"... eh...!?"

"You're joking! Someone approached Mr. Class President!?"

At that moment, Setsuna's gulping down her voice had luckily stopped her from letting out a cry.

"What's with calling him class president even though he's a university student now... it's accurate though..."

"So, so, how'd it go? Did Kitahara-kun go out with her?"

"What happened, Tomochika-kun!?"

"If you're so interested, just ask him personally..."

"Well, not really..."

"Certainly he's smart, tends to people, makes a lot of money, looks good, and if you consider his prospects I'm sure he's quite something!"

"Well he'd be on the right track if he got used to showing himself off a little."

"What's that? You saying Kitahara's a hot item?"

"But he doesn't seem like the kind of guy who'd get close to others."

"That's right, he has this unbalance where he tends to people yet he forces them away."

"... well let's just leave it at that. Anyways, I'm not trying to sell my best friend or anything like that... actually, I've said too much. Forget about it."

Murmuring that at the end, he didn't say any more since claiming to be Haruki's "*best friend*".

"Tomochika-kun!"

"Ogiso? Huh? Your home is this way?"

After the meeting had finished, she called out in a clear and thorough voice that wasn't too loud, to a male student who seemed to be hurrying through the school gates.

"I have something to do in Onjuku... are you going to your part-time job, Tomochika-kun?"

"Yeah, and then Goodies afterward."

And the reality of Setsuna calling out to a guy must have been devastating to those who recognized her as "*Ogiso Setsuna, the Houjou University idol*".

But the man who she called to had only seen her as "*a female friend in the same program*", keeping a natural attitude.

"Really, seems pretty close by."

"Thanks to all this though, it's been awkward encountering so many people."

"Heheh... I also go there sometimes."

Though it was a normal reaction, it wasn't normal at all. Though it was comfortable for her, unfortunately she had no room to recognize that.

"Speaking of which, the school uniform for the girls is quite cute over there."

"I suppose. The same goes for the male customers and the men working there."

"Ahaha... perhaps you're one of them, Tomochika-kun?"

After all, Setsuna already knew that Tomochika Hiroki had been working there in the first place, and calling him from behind like this was no coincidence.

"Cut that out... I was simply introduced there."

"Introduced?"

"This guy knew that I had trouble with living expenses, so he got all involved and forcibly had this story spread to the store..."

"Quite a meddling guy, isn't he...?"

Setsuna knew that it wasn't a lie for him to say that he had "*trouble with living expenses*".

Tomochika Hiroki was an older student who happened to be in the same year, failing the entrance exams and retaking them a year later.

He was a prodigy in high school, and he should have gotten in on the first try, but as luck would have it, his family situation kept him from doing so.

Because three years ago in the winter when he graduated from high school, his mother who was his only family had fallen ill.

And he devoted a year to nursing her as well as making enough money to pay for tuition. Two years ago, he finally managed to enter in the same year as Setsuna and her classmates through a scholarship.

... she heard Takeya grumbling about this at some point.

Io had joked "*It's too bad Haruki got taken by another guy*", but the truth is it wasn't just Takeya that noticed people close to Haruki. Setsuna also almost felt the same way.

"So, I'm guessing it's Haru... Kitahara-kun, right?"

"Heh, you sure know him."

Indeed, the reason why Setsuna called out to him was not to learn about how Tomochika was working so hard.

"Because see, you said he was working with you at that store a while ago..."

It was to learn about the "*meddling guy*" who'd gotten involved in his situation and supported him.

"He was, yeah. Even though it was part-time, he spoke like he was the manager... well, he did work at that level anyway, so no one complained."

"R-Really, is that so?"

"Haruki took care of deciding shifts and training the new guys. Anyone else would think he was a manager-in-training."

"I see, that's why..."

"Hmm?"

"One of the girls working at that store... confessed to him, right?"

She desperately tried to make it sound casual.

Though it was all while desperately hiding her throbbing heart and that she seemed like she'd break a sweat.

"Well... I said it before, but I don't really want to talk about it."

"Ah, I'm sorry. Did I offend you?"

"No, not really."

"I'm really sorry. I was just curious, yet I said something rather rude."

"I'm telling you, I don't really mind..."

All while being obliged to apologize.

All while blaming herself.

"I'm not a decent person... maybe everyone'll end up hating me..."

"Ogiso..."

... however, it was definitely not to put an end to this topic. Setsuna stubbornly continued.

As everyone else kept doing so to her, at some point she came up with this kind of strategy.

She knew people would feel irritated when she did this to them. But Setsuna right now could only do this.

Because she'd been chasing him that much.

Because she was starving for information about Haruki that much.

"... well, I could tell you."

"Tomochika-kun?"

And, Setsuna wondered if it was a bad idea, or maybe that he blinked. Loosening his shoulders, he gave a light smile.

"Or rather, maybe you have a right to know about this, Ogiso?"

"Eh...?"

Along with a light riddle.

"This is just something I heard from the other girls working at the restaurant..."

And he then pressed forward quickly, as if he wasn't as talkative as he seemed to be.

"She confessed to him, but he rejected her."

"Rejected...?"

"In a really cruel way, I hear."

"... eh...?"

At that moment, Setsuna had a very strange look on her face.

Understanding, tense, relieved, doubting, and bitter... she went through each of these in succession, and although the emotions were there, her expression hadn't shown it at all.

"And, since then she hadn't come to work... so supposedly it's been causing other employees some trouble."

Haruki had refused the good intentions of a girl...

The pain in Setsuna's heart built up one by one. She didn't want to believe that *"Haruki-kun wasn't that sort of person"*, but she could end up believing *"But that's how Haruki-kun is right now"*.

Because, if Haruki did end up being that sort of person, to *"those"* that herded him into a corner, it would be harsh and painful.

"... maybe he might get fired?"

"Why?"

"Because it's causing trouble for the other employees, so normally..."

"Like hell it would. It's not like he caused problems with his work, and romance in the workplace would have a bad effect on the restaurant."

"Still..."

"And besides, I don't believe it one bit... though that's just me talking."

"Tomochika-kun...?"

However, this new "*best friend*" of Haruki's had laughed at Setsuna's worries.

"Haruki's not that sort of person. Besides, he meddles in people's affairs, runs everything, and talks too much. Sometimes he's a bit heavy-handed..."

The expression and words he gave came from the overwhelming trust he had in someone who was flexible, who had an unyielding sincerity, and was an earnest person.

"Even so, I guess I should say he's got leadership for tending to people so well... I can't think of anyone else who works so hard."

"T-Thank you..."

"Why are you being grateful, Ogiso?"

"Eh, ah, well..."

Setsuna looked at the older classmate with a bit of a radiant expression, as he was one who should have shouldered his own burden, and had that role pulled away from him.

"... speaking of which, you were with Haruki in the attached school, right? Did you know him from that far back?"

"Well... umm, not really, we weren't in the same class at all..."

"..... I'm pulling your leg. Sorry. That was also mean of me."

"Eh?"

"You're going out with him, aren't you?"

"..... ah..."

And, that expression Tomochika had right there somehow seemed to bring back some hazy, distant memories.

It was an expression that was a little shy, apologetic, and troubled.

"Just so you know, I didn't hear it from Haruki. He seems to keep his mouth shut whenever it's about you."

An expression that told he had secrets he wanted to keep hidden, even though they'd been exposed.

"... well, I don't know if that's a good or bad thing in your case."

An expression that pretended to be thoughtful, but was actually being far more attentive and kind than anyone...

"Hey, Ogiso."

"Eh?"

"I'm guessing, you still can't forget about him?"

"...!"

It was painful for him to ask that question with that look on his face.

Even though he should know.

Even though he should know that expression of his wasn't fake, but real, and not aimed towards himself.

"Well, I'm going this way so..."

"Ah... T-Tomochika-kun..."

"Come to the shop every once in a while. Maybe Haruki'll also be glad to see you?"

"... ah..."

And, in the end he was rather shy, apologetic, and troubled as he ended the discussion. Tomochika disappeared quickly from Setsuna's field of view.

She could only watch him off from behind, dumbfounded, as his figure grew smaller and smaller.

[Edit](#) this section And for a time afterward, there was a bit of a rumor that spread amongst the social science students.

They'd gossip with such vulgar things like, *"The famous university idol voice who's one of our students, "that" Ogiso Setsuna, finally got a boyfriend"*.

But because it was vulgar, it also had a bit of ambiguity that should be of note...

"They walk around campus with their arms linked together!"

"Seems like the girl's the one who's so in love!"

"I saw them from behind as they disappeared into the station hotel!"

"At a glance, the guy looks rather normal, disappointingly."

"I heard they broke up, but the girl was crying so the guy was in a bind."

This was the small part of the rumor that had been spreading for a week...

"Plus, he's so fickle of a guy. That's Takeya for you."

"You can't even complain without picking me out of the lot, can you?"

Takeya and IoThose who didn't believe the accuracy of it all in the first place could only sit here taking in some dull alcohol.

They were at an underground pub close to the university station.

They had been drinking peacefully in the middle of the night with the person they had known for eight years.

... though those two were not going to miss the last train nor drink coffee at dawn. That's the kind of relationship those two had.

"So, how do you feel about it?"

"99% of it is an exaggeration or a lie."

"Though 1% of it seems a bit in-line with reality... I guess the one who spread it was..."

"Yeah, it was Tomochika."

"Oh boy~"

Actually, Takeya happened to catch him as he was doing it.

It was in a lounge where a line had formed for the photocopier, during the last segment of finals.

There he saw two people talking at a round table, with a laptop open and discussing various things.

Setsuna and Tomochika Hiroki were taking the same seminars, plus they were organizing the seminar training camp, and they happened to be sharing the same allotment. When Takeya came across this, common sense dictated to him that this was a simple arrangement.

Even so, seeing as "*the impregnable*" Ogiso Setsuna happened to have a man alone with her in her company, it was probably a big event for the guys who she'd keep rejecting.

However...

"You know, I keep getting phone calls from Setsuna recently."

"Heh, ain't that great? She's been rather reserved for some time now."

"Well, there is that..."

"Somehow you don't seem too clear. Not into this topic?"

"No, things have been nice compared to before. Feels like I got a bit of my past self back."

"... hey, Setsuna-chan can't be serious about Tomochika, right?"

"No, they've always just talked about Haruki-kun. Looks like he's going to be recognized at that cram school he's been tutoring at."

"... wha?"

"Something about all of his students having good grades, compared to those who took the regular tutors' classes."

"... really..."

"Even the students are all like, *"Haruki-kun will definitely be a good teacher"...*"

"....."

"You sure seem happy about it."

"... well, the one who mentioned it was..."

"..... I kinda pity Tomochika-kun..."

To the two who'd get down to the bottom of everything, what she'd learned was rather small. And to a particular someone, one could only call it bogus information.

"W-Well, he's stubborn just like Haruki. And they're not even in a relationship, maybe he's just being real kind..."

"Maybe he could be..."

And as Io gulped down the remaining ice in her glass, she wearily looked up at the ceiling.

"I've just been wondering. Maybe it's about time Setsuna move on and find someone else?"

"... what do you mean?"

And, Takeya followed suit, looking down with what seemed to be sullen face.

"I'm sure it'll be better for them. It's gotten this complicated, you know."

"....."

Actually, he looked rather sullen altogether.

"What do you think, Takeya? Maybe those two should break up?"

"That's not for us to decide."

"Still, as friends isn't it better to give our view on it? We've been hanging out for that long, so it's not a bad idea, is it?"

After all, these two shouldn't have brought up the idea at this time.

And, it wasn't like they didn't know what would come out of it.

... or rather, it wasn't like anything would come of it.

"So, you want this new guy of hers to be Tomochika? Haruki Unit 0?"

"Though it sounds so much better than Takeya Unit 1."

"Because they're similar? Because he'd make a good substitute for Setsuna-chan?"

Takeya again had to throw that out at her, gulping down his drink.

"That's not what I mean. Just chill and think about it for a bit..."

"Sorry, but I can't cool off and make judgment on that. Rather, I don't want to."

"If you want to put it that way, then what about Haruki's feelings?"

"Well..."

... though it was true that they weren't really trying to escape this pointless discussion.

"Setsuna is not hiding it, you know? That she have been trying to reach out to Haruki..."

Since entering university, these two had been meeting each other plenty of times.

"But Haruki's... is he really thinking about Setsuna even now?"

"That's..... I don't know."

"Even you don't know?"

But there weren't moments when they talked about themselves.

"He's too aware of the sin he committed back then."

"Well... that's certainly because Haruki feels guilty about it."

"He'd understand that better than any of us."

They'd drink without giving a toast, talking about things that didn't really go anywhere, and when things got pointless, they'd wrap things up.

"That's why, even if he still likes Setsuna-chan, he wouldn't have the balls to confess. He just doesn't want to go through with it."

"What a bother..."

"That goes for both of them."

Really, it went both ways.

Having this kind of pointless relationship.

Spending time with each other for so long like it was natural.

... these two who were both so bothersome, drinking alcohol even tonight.

"Exams are finally over!"

"Yeah, this time was cutting it close."

The last days of the final exams came on a Saturday in the middle of February.

Unaware of the rumors that continued to spread, a particular couple happened to be in the familiar sidewalk cafe in Building 6.

With exams over, a relieving atmosphere spread through the university. The two felt a great sense of freedom, joking about the exams.

"Really? I heard you kept getting A grades."

"That's because I've been studying hard. This time around, I didn't even get a break from my part-time jobs."

"Eh, why's tha... ah..."

"Besides, even if I go to next year, I don't really have the money..."

"I see..."

He spared some words that were self-demeaning with his slightly cloudy expression. Setsuna realized that she was the only one who was really set free.

She realized that his fight wasn't with the social science program in Houjou University, but with his finances in the Tomochika residence.

"Well... I can't really say much in my case. I do pray that you'll be able to safely

move onto the next year."

"Ogiso, you..."

"Hmm?"

"You seem to be at ease."

"Eh, what's that?"

He was different from other guys, and happened to resemble a certain someone with his slightly off-key praise. Setsuna gazed right at him with a natural look on her face.

"Somehow I don't think things go well when other people sympathize with this sort of thing. It feels like it's just too much."

Tomochika sincerely reflected on the continuing words, *"In the end, it's really my fault for bringing up something no one would like."*

"This isn't special or anything you know."

Indeed this did resemble a certain someone, to which Setsuna gave him a natural, light smile.

"Well it's good that you think in such a clear way about it."

"Because, since I don't get involved in this sort of thing, I can't sympathize with you on those grounds, Tomochika-kun."

"What do you mean by that...?"

"What I can sympathize with, is someone that seriously plans to clear up their situation."

"Ah, I see... certainly someone like that is around here."

"Yup, certainly... heheh..."

And Setsuna naturally expressed her true feelings.

Because Setsuna recognized the feelings toward Haruki she was wrapped in. Anyone would.

And, because anyone would accept Haruki, this was just perfect for Setsuna.

Setsuna'd been hearing from Tomochika about Haruki for the past several days.

Stuff like what job he was at, what he was doing, and what he said.

And how he got involved in other people's affairs, his lecturing, and his kindness.

Though at no point did Haruki's feelings for Setsuna come up at all, even so it was enough to comfort her through her loneliness.

In addition, since he too idolized him, he could sympathize with her situation.

"Well then, spring break starts tomorrow. Guess the main camp event's finally here."

"It'll get real hectic... let's get on with the meeting, shall we?"

Which was why Setsuna was at ease in this union she had with him.

Because it was nothing more than lodging together as organizers of the seminar camp.

Because they were friends who gossiped about the same thing.

"Though the remaining thing today is just to follow up with those who were absent."

"How many do we have?"

"We have twenty-five attending and three not attending. So that leaves sixteen..."

And Setsuna figured their relationship wouldn't change from someone normal like him looking at her. She didn't feel guilty at all about Tomochika.

Because he was different from other male students, and didn't hide his true character.

Because he was quite at ease when the topic was about Haruki.

And because more than anything Setsuna believed that *"People who like Haruki-kun can't be bad"*. Other people would say it was a stunningly crazy believe though.

"Eh? The count's off. Wasn't it seventeen?"

"Huh? That can't be..."

"Because look, We had forty-five people in the seminar for second year, right? And twenty-eight people replied back, yes?"

"Ah...!"

"See, it should be seventeen. Can I see the list of attendees?"

"Ah, wait a second, Ogiso..."

Which was why, at that moment, Setsuna had completely missed his swayed expression.

"We left one person out. It'd be sad if we didn't contact them, right?"

"....."

Because she fully trusted him.

That she was his friend.

That he didn't have anything else other than being a friend.

And because he was her friend, that he wouldn't have anything to hide...

"... eh?"

Setsuna's gaze stopped on the display that showed the checked list of names.

And her gaze didn't stop at where she wanted to look, but the exact opposite...

"..... it's not here..."

"..."

It stopped at the reality of the fact that forty-five students had dropped to forty-four for the seminar...

"Haruki-kun's name..."

Because that was the first name Setsuna would have checked from the list to see if it had disappeared.

"Y-Yeah... about that..."

"!? About that... what?"

"W-Well, you see..."

"What? What's going on?"

Her voice was frantic.

Her tongue was tied up.

Her pulse sped up so much she hated it.

"Haruki's not going to be in our seminar."

"W... why!?"

Like all the pores in her skin would open up...

She felt as if she'd break out in a cold sweat.

"See..... he's changing programs starting from April. To literature."

"..... eh?"

Setsuna's face froze in an instant.

Her emotions cut off from her expression.

... because if she didn't, she'd show a face she wouldn't show anyone else.

"You have, one new message. 20:32."

"....."

"Setsuna? It's me, Io."

"Haruki just came back from work. I talked to him a bit."

"... sorry, we didn't know until today that he was changing programs."

"Just until now he was in a bit... well, an argument, I guess."

"Takeya was pretty pissed off actually..."

"I suppose he was a bit shocked that Haruki didn't ask for his advice."

"He's been bitter even after heading home... quite a pain to get him to cool off."

"Well, besides what's happening with us..."

"We told Haruki to try to talk with you once more."

"Setsuna, did you tell him something like *"I'll do my best here too"*?"

"What are you gonna do forcing yourself like that...? You need to be angry at him."

"You can't just let him do things like this you know?"

"Listen. Be sure to talk to him once more, okay?"

"No, not just once more. Keep talking to him until you're fine with it, okay?"

"You're a good girl, Setsuna, so Takeya and I'll follow up with you."

"Anyways, I'll call you later. See ya."

"..... ah, one more thing."

"You're twenty today... happy birthday."

"...!"

Setsuna was about to throw her cellphone the moment the voicemail finished its playback... giving up, she left it on top of the bed.

Perhaps she happened to cool down a bit, realizing that taking it out on her cellphone or at Io was wrong.

She remained this way, with her eyes wide open.

She shut herself inside her bedroom and locked the door, despite the fact her family was preparing for her birthday party. She hadn't answered them calling for her, as she remained knelt down on the floor...

".....!"

Her stomach turned when she reflected on the circumstances she put herself in.

She'd taken in such huge amounts of coffee at the sidewalk cafe before coming back home.

Because, at that time, "*Harukithat person*" had been in front of her, snatching away all of her strength...

Once she heard from Tomochika that Haruki would be changing programs, she immediately started searching around the university for him.

Since she figured it wouldn't end with just a call to his cellphone, or that he might not pick up at all, she didn't have the courage to call him.

Was it because he didn't want to let go? Was it because talking about changing programs was awkward? Or was it because he finally decided to just not talk with her in any manner...

As she drew up these possibilities in her head, her mind wore down more and more.

She'd just taken back such a good balance with her emotions. She was afraid it was going to be all for nothing.

She finally found him, thirty minutes later.

... at the campus gates, waiting for Setsuna.

It seemed that Haruki had been prepared for this as well.

But it also seemed that he didn't have the courage to call her cellphone either.

Afterward, they returned to the sidewalk cafe to talk.

At the same table where Tomochika was thirty minutes ago.

At the same table from thirty minutes ago, where the classmates had such puzzled faces that she didn't have time to care for.

Because it'd been such a while since she got to talk to him...

"I see. You want to become a publisher, so..."

Setsuna couldn't actually convey almost any of her feelings to him at all. Like that she should have heard about this, about the feelings she had up until now, and the fury she had right now.

"Eh? Ah, not at all. I think literature'll fit you. You're a good wordsmith after all, Haruki-kun."

Instead she desperately tried hard to seem as if she was understanding, being indifferent to the reason behind Haruki changing programs.

"I see... you've already figured out all the details. I really can't match up to you."

While, keeping a smile...

"We'll see each other, won't we?"

How?

They hadn't seen each other recently.

"H-Hey... is it okay if I call you from now on?"

How?

They hadn't called each other recently.

Exactly how did they plan to connect to each other since they'd been set apart?

"It'll be fine, right?"

What'll be fine?

"W-What am I saying, anyway? Aha, ahaha...!"

Really, what was it that she was saying...?

The words she had at that moment disappeared in fragments.

However, she no longer remembered if she even followed up in such a thoughtless way.

The only thing she remembered, was the smile she put on as they parted.

And that she turned away to leave the cafe, as if she were running away. To keep that smile from falling apart perhaps several seconds later.

— — Why?

Why did it turn out this way...?

She'd asked herself countless times now.

A trial that would never give an answer. A labyrinth that would never have an exit.

— — Why now?

I hate this.

I really hate this.

Because, because, it'll soon be my...

— — My birthday, you know?

February 14.

To the world it was Valentine's Day. To the Ogiso residence, it was Setsuna's birthday.

And this year was far more special...

"~~~!!"

The snow came falling down.

She looked up at the window from her cold room that seemed like it'd freeze up.. She looked at the white mark of betrayal in the sky, like what happened two years ago...

..... no, that was an illusion.

Even back then, Haruki didn't come.

Even back then, he betrayed Setsuna.

Those snowflakes were afterimages coming from memories that wouldn't go away.

Because Setsuna didn't see anything right now.

She buried her face in the darkness, from outside the window, from the clouds, from the snow, and from reality, and just about everything...

"Setsuna! Come down this instant!"

"....."

The voice of her mother from downstairs grew even louder.

But, it was useless.

She didn't want to eat anything right now.

She didn't want to see her family either. She didn't want to talk to them.

Because right now, if someone talked to her in a kind voice...

She couldn't imagine how she would lose it and go on a rage, and how she'd end up depending on them.

"At least show your face! You have a visitor!"

"..... eh?"

"Listen. Be sure to talk to him once more, okay?"

Those words fired off in her brain, coming from someone just a short while ago.

"Haruki-kun...!"

Which was why Setsuna got up in a hurry...

She found it was too hard to get around, as she hadn't moved for the whole day.

She desperately gathered up her strength, only being able to move in a rather stiff fashion.

Her mind was in a rush, but she had to come down the stairs slowly.

Bracing herself, she opened up the entranceway, and opened up the gate doors...

"Ogiso..."

"..... eh?"

Setsuna once again stiffened up, in that clear, dark, and cold weather.

Because a visitor she hadn't expected had been standing there.

"Sorry for visiting you this late."

"Tomochika... kun? What's wrong?"

"What's wrong...? Well..."

Other people would figure she'd be mad just by hearing him answer like this.

Normally she would have expected who would visit.

After all, out of all the classmates, he was the one she saw the most recently...

"You seemed really out of it at the time... and I was wondering why..."

"A... ahh..."

Even so, Setsuna couldn't wipe away the malaise in her entire body.

Because after all, he didn't have the "*status*" of the person who should have appeared before her.

"Sorry, Ogiso..."

"For what?"

That was the pride of how she thought from the depths of her heart. Of how the changed Setsuna was now.

But that way of thinking wasn't to look down on her popularity or reputation.

Because Setsuna had grown up.

That's not how she would think at all.

... in comparison to a certain best friend who was on the verge of leaving.

"For not really bringing up Haruki changing programs."

"That's... not Tomochika-kun's fault."

"Even so, let me apologize... I'm sorry."

"It's fine..."

She really didn't mind.

Because he wasn't a factor in the decision Haruki had come to.

"Even so... what'll you do from here on out, Ogiso?"

"What'll I do...? That's..."

She wanted him to leave her be.

She wanted to be alone.

She had no time to worry about other people right now.

"Even if he changes programs, I still want things to be the same between the two of us."

"The... same..."

"Remaining as best friends... is what I mean."

"..."

She was envious of him saying "best friends". And she was envious of him having a dazzling expression, doing so.

She envied him, from the bottom of her heart...

"I'll still see him at work anyway... well, since we're taking different classes, we won't be preparing for exams together, I think."

Setsuna remained captive of this jealousy, hearing these optimistic words coming from him...

"So you can use me like you've always done up until now."

"..... eh?"

And for a while, she didn't really understand the meaning behind the words he just spouted.

"Ah, well, I don't want you to get the wrong idea out of that..."

"U-Umm...?"

"How should I put it? Certainly, I'm happy that you like Haruki."

"O-Okay...?"

"And, I like how you fuss over him so much as well."

Setsuna realized one thing about the true nature of the malaise she felt.

That he went from using the name "*Ogiso*" to "*you*"^[2]...

"What attracted me to you wasn't how cute you were, or how you brought about such a great atmosphere... ah, well, of course, I do also like those parts."
"!?"

And it was mixed in with words that other guys would say.

If this continued, at some point he might start calling him "*Setsuna*"...

"But what attracted me to you was your true nature far more than how you look on the outside, see."

— — *He said it!*

He said, he was attracted to me.

He said... he liked me.

..... I've been fooled!

There wasn't a single mistake Tomochika had made.

The mistake most certainly came from Setsuna's resentment...

The resentment she had towards her "*real*" "*true nature*".

"Like how it was you understood Haruki's merits far more quickly than anyone."

— — *That's wrong, that's wrong...*

I'm not faster than... anyone.

I'm the second person to do so.

Tomochika's words glided by Setsuna's skin as it took it in.

And the moment it did, she got goosebumps.

"Like how you didn't look at other people as they approached you, falling in love with him out of your own will, and proactively approaching him..."

— — *That's wrong, that's wrong...*

I didn't do it out of my own will.

It was because it felt the "strongest", that I just had to.

"Which is why, even though one would normally figure you two didn't match up, Haruki fell in love with you as well."

— — *What? What do you mean?*

Why does someone who knows nothing talk about just me and Haruki-kun?

Why does someone who doesn't know about us three talk about us two?

"So, you can be like you've always been."

Tomochika's words didn't lie, trap, or scheme against her.

"So, you can use me like you've always had."

A sincere and honest confession, aimed only at her heart.

"You can talk about Haruki's secrets, or anything. I'll try to be that one friend you can talk to."

... just that, if there was one thing he had gotten wrong, it's that he didn't know these righteous words and feelings were never going to reach Setsuna in the first place.

Was it sincere, or just convenient?

Was it honest, or just thoughtless?

Because to Setsuna right now, none of that had any meaning to her.

"And, and you know..."

— — *Stop it.*

"If it turns out you two can't bring yourselves together again..."

— — *Stop it.*

Stop it, stop it, stop it!

"I can take Haruki's place instead..."

"... ah..."

— — *He said it.*

"Happy birthday, Ogiso..."

"....."

— — *He, confessed.*

I let my guard down.

"I hope you can accept this."

— — *I'm sorry, Haruki-kun.*

The man who betrayed me two years ago.

The man who kept his distance a year ago.

And the man who right now wouldn't even dare come close...

— — *I'm sorry.*

Even so, Haruki the one who betrayed her was the only person in her mind.

"I can understand how Haruki's trying to run away from you."

"He's a good guy. He's serious, and he's honest."

"Which is why he can't forgive himself for having betrayed you even once."

"I want to root for you guys as well."

"But I think one of you might not be able to take it anymore."

"So, I think it's better you let him go."

"You really do understand, don't you?"

"The fact that you can never let him go is putting Haruki through hell."

"That's right, Haruki's suffering. And you're suffering."

"If so, then couldn't I put an end to that suffering?"

".....!"

Setsuna didn't move from that spot, even when Tomochika left.

No, even if he were here, she would never have moved an inch.

She didn't have the usual worried expression she would with his confession.

She wasn't able to do anything... not even reject him, accept him, laugh, nor cry...

He left a present on the ground in front of her.

She didn't even say thanks.

She didn't even give him anything for Valentine's Day the day to give something back.

And somewhere along the way, she couldn't accept anything.

She could only stare out dumbfounded, not looking at him, at the sky, or anything.

And even Tomochika, who gave her something, had perplexed her as she didn't respond.

... no, he had definitely hurt her.

"....."

But Setsuna didn't have time to think about Tomochika.

Because her mind was so messed up, she couldn't think about anything.

Because someone other than him was hurting her.

Because he wasn't aware... that his actions had committed a sin.

And, because of one more thing...

"You're here, aren't you..."

Because she had noticed.

"..... Haruki-kun..."

Because when Tomochika had left, and turned a corner, she saw something extraordinary...

Setsuna eyed another silhouette in the convex mirror.

"Setsuna..."

He'd taken three deep breaths since she called him, and then finally revealed himself from the corner.

The same Haruki she'd met yesterday.

The same Haruki she'd parted with yesterday.

The same Haruki, that told her, he'd be changing programs.

"You saw... didn't you?"

"Setsuna... I..."

"It's okay, already..."

She could tell from the look on his face.

That he had heard pretty much everything.

"It's fine..."

Or rather, it was an expression he'd had for a year now.

As someone who always lectured with the idea of *"look them in the eye when you're talking to them"*, he didn't even try to make eye contact, looking downward.

And the expression he had was pretty much the same; an awkwardness, a feeling of guilt.

"Why didn't you come out?"

"That's..."

And surely, for a period of time, Haruki didn't see the look on her face.

She had upturned eyes, laying low as she peered into Haruki's face with a mischievous smile. And a thin, fleeting smile that couldn't be seen, but she was indeed smiling.

"You held back from Tomochika-kun?"

It was painful.

It was awkward.

And, because he'd seen it.

He'd seen the one scene he shouldn't have. He'd seen the one person he shouldn't have.

"He's... really, worried I think. He's worried about you, and he's worried about me."

"Ah, yeah... I suppose..."

Which was why she wanted to apologize.

For making Haruki's best friend suffer. Someone who was important to him.

For making Tomochika misunderstand while he hadn't noticed. For hurting him.

And... though these were things that Setsuna had hoped for...

She wanted to apologize for making Haruki suffer.

And perhaps, for making him jealous.

"You and Tomochika-kun... get along pretty well..."

And if so, then perhaps she really did need to apologize from the bottom of her heart.

To cling desperately to him, to throw everything at him, and even let out her tears.

"He's... doing his best. Far more than what I could ever do, so..."

"Yeah, you're right, I think so too. He really is someone I can respect."

"Setsuna..."

And this time, this was a chance for their hearts to reach out for one another.

This time, if they managed to reconcile...

"So that's why you're giving me to him? You're yielding me, to him?"

But it was far too late.

Setsuna's mind was far too worn out.

"It's fine if it's him? He'd take care of me? He'd only look at me? He'd always be with me?"

The dark feelings that swirled within her all gathered up like a river.

"So he's going to relieve you, then? So you can just forget about me? So you don't have to suffer anymore?"

Just about everything polluted and hung over her; Haruki, Setsuna, the history they had, and the past the three had.

"That's great... that's really great, you know...!!"

She desperately tried hard to keep her heart afloat, but it was violently boiling over at the tip.

"What do you mean giving you to him, or yielding you to him... you own yourself, Setsuna. You're not anyone's thing, right?"

"You think that's what I wanted to hear!?"

"Setsuna..."

"...!"

Haruki finally looked at her directly.

"Sorry..."

But the look he had on his face was already colored in despair, overshadowing what he had when he looked down.

— — T-That's, that's not it...

I just, wanted to apologize.

"I'm really, really sorry..."

And when he'd realized it, it was too late.

Haruki had hurt her far more than he'd known, and hurt her even more over this.

He'd fallen into this negative spiral again, like he always had.

"I know that I've been making you suffer like this so much, Setsuna..."

— — That's not it!

I'm the one who's at fault!

"But I've never been able to do anything."

— — *I'm sorry for making you suffer so.
I'm sorry for letting my guard down.*

"Not even take a step forward, or backward."

— — *I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry! Even though you're the only one I have...!*

"Please let me say it one more time."

— — *So please, be angry with me...*

"I'm sorry, Setsuna..."

— — *Please, just snap at me. Yell at me.
... I don't mind if you slap me.*

"I know this has happened so much you couldn't forgive me, but really, I'm sorry."

— — *Give us a chance.
Give us a chance to once again clash with one another.*

"But..."

— — *If you can, then this time, I...
This time...*

"No matter what happens, I wanted to settle this."

"A-Ahaha..."

The snow came falling down.

Falling to a place where only Setsuna remained.

"Ahaha... haha..."

In this cold weather that seemed like it'd freeze up.

She looked at the white mark of betrayal in the sky, like what happened two

years ago...

..... this time the snow was real.

Even back then, Haruki didn't come.

And even now, Haruki left.

Even back then, he betrayed Setsuna.

And even now, he ran away, not having made up.

Just like that, the past that wouldn't disappear would again create the same reality.

"Ahahahaha... hahaha... aaaaggghhhhh...!!"

Worn out, Setsuna no longer had the willpower to stop this reality.

— — *This time, I'll forget about him.*

I don't want to be near him if it's going to make me suffer so.

He also thinks the same way. That's why he left me here.

— — *Then, I'll forget about him.*

I'll build up things that I hate about him, and forget about him.

I'll just hate him. I'll just seriously hate him.

I've already found the first thing I hate about him.

I hate how he remains silent, and keeps his distance from me...

— — *Hey, Haruki-kun. This time, things are over between us, aren't they?*

Isn't that great...? And, farewell.

1. ↑ [Jump up to: 1.0 1.1](#) Reference to [Manzai](#) comedy
2. [Jump up](#) ↑

The translation actually says that Tomochika went from using "Ogiso" (小木曾) to "kimi" (君), which also means "you". Though this isn't a hard rule, in some cases "kimi" could be used to indicate intimacy.

White Album 2 Omake/Story04/Chapter 3/All

April.

Three years had finally passed since Setsuna enrolled in Houjou University.

It was the season where The Love That Will Not Reach the standard number for winter would stop playing from the university FM radio...

"Setsuna~ next week will be the last party for new students, so be sure to come!"

"The graduate seniors will be pushing for us to come this time, okay?"

"I know... I'm going, okay?"

Entering a new school term, even as she moves up a year, Setsuna was again in the center of everyone.

"You don't have plans, right? You'll finish at fourth period, right? I'll grab you when lectures end, okay?"

"I'll be watching from the morning. Don't take her in any weird manner."

"Geez, that's the fifth time you've driven nails into me. Don't you trust me at all?"

"Like hell I would..."

"Who was it I wonder, the one who said she would come to the seminar camp, and yet cancelling at the last minute~"

"I-I've told you many times... I caught influenza..."

A month and a half, after Setsuna had turned twenty-one...

Until the new term started, Setsuna spent her spring break as a "*known shut-in*".

Of course, she wasn't hit with influenza or anything. She didn't go to the planned seminar camp and did nothing from morning to evening. In general, she avoided seeing other people.

"Even Kitahara-san isn't inviting you? It's all over, sis."

"Haruki-kun's going to be working for the entire spring break. He's different from you, who just keeps playing video games at home."

"So in other words, he's not going with some other girl... well, you should just give up since you both are useless."

She remained like this at home the entire time...

In short, she hadn't told her family she'd broken up with him.

And Setsuna found another thing that she hated about Haruki.

She hated how she lied to him in such a miserable way.

"That was quite a hassle back then."

"Yeah yeah, the two from the organizing group both dropped out~"

Remembering such a horrible event, the blame on the two friends from the stressful group hadn't ended.

However, the way they said it had a far stronger and interesting meaning than being resentful...

"Hey Setsuna, I know I've been a nag asking you this, but just honestly answer us."

"... what happened with Tomochika-kun?"

"I've given you the same answer many times, nothing happened."

At some point, proof of that came from somewhere else.

"Well at the time, both of you cancelled on the same day, you see."

"In truth, the two of you were eloping... or not. There's rumors saying the two of you might be going ahead or something."

"Rumors are just rumors... don't get dragged down by such stupid stuff."

Just like Haruki, Tomochika hadn't seen Setsuna since her birthday that night.

Which was why she wouldn't tell anyone about what happened that night.

... save for herself.

"Because you see, at the time you guys got along so well. I really thought things were going fine."

"Also, I hadn't seen him since we entered third year."

"Yeah yeah, maybe something serious happened... did you guys get in a fight?"

"Like we'd... do something like that."

If there wasn't someone she'd seriously be angry with, then there's no way she'd get in an argument.

In other words, that's how it was.

"So please, let's stop talking about that..."

"Even if you say so, it was really a hassle back then."

"Yeah yeah, if not for the late Mr. Class President we wouldn't have pulled through."

"Indeed, what would have happened if Kitahara-kun weren't around...?"

"Look, I won't skip out next time, so please don't bring it up again!"

The development behind why Setsuna and Tomochika didn't participate in the seminar camp was a peculiar one.

When the two unexpectedly cancelled their plans, the other organizers who hadn't heard the whole story were left in a bind. And suddenly, a savior had arrived, substituting for the two.

... in other words, it was Kitahara Haruki, who changed programs in the spring and should have left the seminar.

His ability to coordinate things and hardworking diligence, along with exploiting the cowardice and impudence of the teachers and seniors, allowed him to redo the attendance list from scratch.

But it didn't stop there. He accompanied the seminar itself, not only taking control of Setsuna and Tomochika's jobs, but also keeping an eye on the work of other organizers. He'd be relentless with anyone who was slacking on their share, and finally he took full control of all the organizers.

He'd allot rooms from the Western boardinghouse, transport people to the skiing area, organize parties, purchased necessary supplies, *etc.* He'd never go out himself, but he pulled all the strings...

And at the end, one of the seniors injured themselves while skiing, and he'd organize for them to be sent back to Tokyo.

When Setsuna heard from the other organizers afterward about this somewhat meaningless legend, she stopped short of screaming angrily, "*Why didn't you tell us!?*" To begin with, she wasn't qualified to say something like that as she had supposedly caught influenza, so she sank into silence.

And for a while, she figured it'd be a mistake to be excited over whoever's sake it was Haruki had interfered for. She reconsidered it as a weak point of his rather than a strong one.

And Setsuna found another thing that she hated about Haruki.

She hated how he lectured sarcastically, making her feel guilty.

It was around the middle of April.

Around the time where the professors would end the introductory formalities and move on to the actual subject material.

"Is he... really not coming?"

Expecting someone, Setsuna waited at the entrance of the second cafeteria on the north side of the campus.

It wasn't really warm at all, as it was still chilly when fourth period ended and the evening came. She was shivering a little bit, holding her shoulders.

Her gaze was fixated on the path leading straight to Building 3's front entrance.

It was from there that students would come out one by one from lectures and seminars that seemed to have ended, merging with the campus populace.

Speaking of which, the second cafeteria in Building 3 was directly opposite of the social sciences' Building 6 on the south.

To get between the north and south sides of the long Houjou campus, one would need to spend more than ten minutes walking.

The reason why the home-keeping Setsuna would walk all this way was...

"What's going on... Haruki-kun...?"

Of course, because this was the literature program's turf.

Yesterday, Io called her with some interesting information.

It was about Haruki who had changed programs entering third year, but since the new term started his attendance was rather poor.

This was coming from Takeya's girlfriend friend , who'd seen him go to Building 3 at least three times over the past two weeks.

If he were in arts and sciences, perhaps he'd have been finished here. Even in social sciences, as "*that*" Haruki who was a master at earning his credits, this would have been a state of emergency.

... incidentally, there was an inconsistency with Io giving her rumors about Haruki which was particularly obvious...

In other words, Setsuna hadn't told her best friends that she'd broken up with him.

She was so into keeping secrets that one would doubt whether she was even ready to break up with him.

"..... haah..."

Setsuna sighed at the pain from noticing each of these things come one after another, reflecting on all these events in her mind.

Was there something in waiting for Haruki like this?

Even if Haruki did come to university today, nonetheless she wouldn't be talking with him.

She'd just be relieved, and fret over things that worried her.

And even if Haruki didn't come to university today, nonetheless she wouldn't be calling to check on him.

Her unease would just grow, and she'd be even more worried.

What she was doing had absolutely no meaning whatsoever. One could only see her as a pitiful stalker.

But from Setsuna's point of view, everything was Haruki's fault.

For someone who lectured people to not skip lectures, and yet not come to university...

Having said he changed programs thinking about employment, it was as if what he talked about didn't quite match up.

This is what one would call being worried.

She hated going out of her way to walk this far like this a little bit.

She hated doing this sort of pitiful thing a little bit.

She hated being worried like this a little bit.

Putting together these three things that she "*hated a little bit*", it formed a new thing she hated about him.

"Ah...!!"

Though she went through a struggle softening that grim expression of hers...

Even so, there was no way she would miss that familiar jacket coming from Building 3.

"..... eh?"

And incidentally, there was no way she would miss the girl that clung to his arm coming out of Building 3.

"Come on, Haruki~ Let's go for a drink! It's been so long since you came~"
"Like I'm going to join someone who had a hangover for two days straight last week. Hey, let go!"

"What's with that, when I'm giving you such a warm reception?"

"You know, I've been the one paying for your drinks haven't I?"

"W-Well~ this month has been quite a pain, you see!"

"Same here, what a coincidence. Anyways, I'm busy with work this month. Later."

"Ahhh! You're heartless~! Are you saying it's okay for me to be sober or something!?"

"Isn't it great to be healthy? So let go. You're pulling on my clothes, you know!"

".....!"

She wasn't able to approach him, let alone chase after him.

She could only let the girl that passed by cling onto him.

Hiding from them, she let them do as they pleased, shivering from the disgrace of not being discovered, and a bit swayed by such unreasonable emotions.

She didn't get a look at her face, nor did she want to see it.

She just knew based on her manners and voice that her personality was completely different from her own.

An assertiveness that let her freely talk to him. A carefree cheerfulness.

And most importantly, the reality that she'd accept him.

... all of these were things she had before that she'd lost now.

And Setsuna found another thing that she hated about Haruki.

She absolutely hated how he made other people worry, and then treated them like total trash.

"Did he... lose a bit of weight?"

As he had already walked off far away, she was going to check next time. Planting a new seed of worry in her mind, Setsuna stood there for a bit.

"Then, I'm up next..... well, to whatever's here on out. Cheers~!"

"Ah, okay... let's do our best... gulp..."

"Woah~ great, great! You can really take quite a bit, Ogiso-chan!"

"Hey, you seniors shouldn't be making her drink so much. She can only take a mouthful after all."

"Well, if she's like this I'm sure she can go all out."

"Aren't you just hiding what you're really up to?"

"No, it's not like that..... that was great!"

"S-Setsuna...?"

"Woah~ great, great~! Then, my cup's up next..."

Setsuna was rather quick with the pitcher when she was at the weekend welcoming party for new students.

Hiding away her usual shy and reserved manners, she focused on drinking, and answered when asked. However, she didn't return a smile when it came to stupid topics.

To the people who would always force her to join their parties, it was such a bewildering scene.

And no one could imagine the reason behind it had anything to do with a certain male student who had just changed programs, nor that the university idol was so jealous of someone...

"That blouse looks cute! Is it new this year?"

"Ah, who knows...? I thought it'd be nice to buy it."

If one called looking through a bargain mail catalog and carefully selecting it as nice, then what Setsuna said was correct.

With the exception of the enjoyable six months she had at the attached school, Setsuna was always a pretentious girl.

Though even she lost sight of how people saw her or what she was proud of.

"So your standards are that high for guys too?"

"Look you guys, I told you that asking Setsuna these questions is off limi..."

"I suppose... I don't mind if they're spending money or anything, but I like people who take care of how they look."

"S..... Setsuna?"

"Oh~, got it, got it~ you're right about that one~"

"Wait, you mean a guy who'd be in the same league as Miss Houjou. That's the worst situation to be in!"

Though it was quite a safe answer for her to give...

Even so, it was quite an event for these male students to see *"that"* Ogiso Setsuna talk about hobbies men have for the first time.

"Hey, Ogiso-chan, mind taking a look here? Maybe my clothes today would go well with you? Though I imported this directly from Italy..."

"You just don't get it, man. She said it was nothing to do with money."

"First you gotta rise above people~ you've got no balance whatsoever."

While the guys around Setsuna were in confusion over her words...

— — *That's right, pay attention for a bit, will you?*

That's the same jacket from last year. That girl was also wearing it too,

wasn't she?

And because a girl would wear it, that's not a jacket you should be wearing...!

Setsuna had only guilty thoughts about a guy who was far different from the lot here.

A thoughtless guy who always wore the same clothes, had a hairstyle that hadn't changed since high school, and had no fashion sense other than his own hygiene.

Though it wasn't something that would put him at ease, other people would have judged his appearance as average...

Certainly if the people here commented on him, they'd all drum on how he wasn't suitable as *"a guy in the same league as Ogiso Setsuna"*.

Even so, this popular Miss Houjou had been hanging around such a guy for two years.

Even though he was so careful with his manners and money, even so it was as if he never answered her.

And Setsuna found another thing that she hated about Haruki.

She hated how he didn't notice how he looked to others, nor that he even cared.

And even after the party, Setsuna was right in the center of the surrounding graduate students...

Though they'd spent more than two hours, so the tired students finally began scattering, and a calm atmosphere soon reigned in.

When they did, as they were about to step outside and discuss how they were doing...

"Oh yeah, I saw Tomochika a while ago."

"Oh~ Where at?"

"His apartment. He'd been helping people move in next door."

"Oh yeah, he didn't show up even once to the seminar. Does he plan on dropping out?"

"I also asked him that, but his words weren't all that clear..."

"It'd be bad if he did. I'm relying on his notes after all."

"You shouldn't be worrying over a reason that doesn't even seem like you're true friends..."

"It's because when Kitahara disappeared, Tomochika end up being our last stand."

"Ah, that's right, Kitahara was also there too."

"Again...? So the two of them plan on going to three part-time jobs together?"

"Well, even if it turns out they did, that just means he's still hanging out with him despite changing programs."

"Maybe only the smart guys really talk with one another...?"

"What...?"

"....."

"....."

"Umm... Ogiso?"

"Ah... don't mind me, just continue on."

"Umm, even if you tell us that..."

"The seniors are all staring at us, you see..."

Right at the end of the table were two guys who were so tired, gossiping about such unimportant things. And at some point, Setsuna, who was supposed to be in the center of everyone, happened to jump right in.

... right around the point where they said, *"Oh, that's right, Kitahara was also there too."*

"Ah~ geez! He just pisses me off!!"

Kicking away at the road with her shoe heels left quite the echo, shortening the lifespan of her heels, and herself.

It'd been fifteen minutes since she got off from Suetsuguchou station and taken this path. Sometimes she'd be cursing, feeling down, or get so agitated she'd walk fast.

It was 9:40 PM.

At 9 PM when the main party ended, the guys believed Setsuna would join them for the follow-up party. However Setsuna betrayed them with the words, *"It's curfew"*. Lightly rejecting anyone's invitation to send her home, she disappeared through the ticket gates.

Her female classmates would be relieved figuring, *"Ah, it's the usual Setsuna"*. Even so, it was easy to imagine that it was a disaster for the male graduate students who couldn't hold themselves back.

But Setsuna didn't care about it at all...

— — *So it was for Tomochika-kun, wasn't it?*
It wasn't for me at all, was it?

At the get-together, Haruki being brought up had excited Setsuna in an instant.

However, as she learned about the finer details, she became more and more irritated.

Haruki was working with Tomochika even though he'd changed programs, and even now they'd been talking with one another.

He wouldn't contact her. He wouldn't even come close to her, or even look for her.

Back then, he wouldn't even apologize, object, make excuses, or even scold her.

Despite all that, he hadn't cut ties with Tomochika, who had unexpectedly confessed to her, and made her suffer.

It was something Setsuna wouldn't accept.

After all, it all became clear to her.

The reason why he came to cover for the spring seminar camp...

The reality of how he'd continue to get involved for his friends...

— — *Haruki-kun, you haven't changed a bit, being so kind to anyone.*

But you're so cruel for not even being kind to me...

Haruki-kun, you haven't changed a bit, lecturing even girls.

But you're so cruel for not even lecturing me...

Haruki-kun, you haven't changed a bit, getting involved with your friends all the time.

But you're so cruel for not even getting involved with me...

And Setsuna found two more things that she hated about Haruki.

She hated Haruki for moving into a different world from Tomochika, with a different girl.

She hated Haruki for not being in the world that she couldn't slip away from.

"He really..... really pisses me off!!"

The only thoughts running in her mind were that of Haruki.

Piling on these "*hateful*" thoughts further invited feelings toward him that were stronger than before.

"... ah..."

Setsuna had gotten it wrong from the start.

She shouldn't have been "*hating*" him, but she should have been "*indifferent*" with him.

But Setsuna was in no position to recognize such an obvious reality, having snapped one of her shoe heels, and amazingly standing up on just one foot.

May.

A beautiful afternoon, on the last day of Golden Week.

"Hey sis, it's something I've wanted to say..."

"Whatever it is, don't say it."

"Are you happy being a shut-in even during all of Golden Week in the spring break?"

"I told you not to say it..."

Setsuna spent the consecutive holidays just as her younger brother pointed

out.

On top of that, avoiding other people, and doing nothing from morning until evening...

"University starts tomorrow... I really don't wanna go..."

"... the May blues?"

But she only had a day left to escape from reality.

She'd meet so many people once today ended, but the days of not being with Haruki would begin.

Despite the fact he hadn't talked with her, even though they used to be in the same program.

Despite the fact that she'd dragged herself on, being all alone.

Despite the fact they'd broke up in spring.

Despite the fact she had no further reason to feel so empty.

Even so, Setsuna waited for tomorrow, hurting herself once more.

... and, just when Setsuna had again sunk into despair, the high-pitched sound of the doorbell came from the entranceway.

"Sis, you got a visitor."

"Your sister's in a dressing gown."

"Even I'm wearing pajamas."

"The neighbors will talk about it if I go out looking like this. Are you okay with that?"

"Then you should at least wear something at home..."

Certainly, the eldest daughter of the Ogiso residence was known by the neighbors as "*well brought up*", both physically and in personality. But to her younger brother

Takahiro

, who'd seen her slouch around every day at home like this, there was no way he'd even humor the thought.

"Look, it's ringing again."

"I know already... okay, oka~y, wait a second~!"

Having been called twice, Takahiro finally got fed up, going through the hallway and outside.

There was an intercom in the living room used for this, but there wasn't a single person within the Ogiso family who was so uptight that they'd use such crime prevention tools.

For a short while, there was the sound of the entranceway door opening, Takahiro talking with someone, and then for a short while, the sound of his footsteps as he came back echoed...

"Sis, you got a visitor."

"... who is it?"

Indeed she was no longer too optimistic about meeting Haruki directly.

And thirty minutes later...

The two spent ten minutes walking from her home, stopping by a coffee shop, taking facing seats at a table by the window.

"It's been a while."

"... was it?"

Regardless of whether it was, it'd been already three months since they hadn't met.

"Sorry for not contacting you for so long. There was... well, a lot of things."

"Hmm..."

She also had a lot of things to deal with.

"Did you... lose a bit of weight?"

"Who knows... I can't even tell."

"I lost about eight kilograms... it's quite tough helping people move between homes."

She hadn't noticed at all whether she'd gotten lighter or heavier, or if she'd become whiter or more tanned.

... after all, she had no idea what kind of expression she had for so long now.

And, she hadn't the urge to look at him in such a friendly manner.

"So, what's the matter? ... Tomochika-kun?"

Even if she was allowed to see him, that sliver of hope she had was indeed for nothing.

"I was worried... about leaving things unfinished, you see."

"....."

Tomochika had a somewhat shy, apologetic, and troubled look on his face.

But that all had no meaning to Setsuna right now.

It was all just the look of a bewildered man.

"And, umm... let's make this, quick..."

"Umm..."

"Hmm?"

"I'm sorry, I have to hurry back home soon."

"Y-Yeah. Sorry. I realize I wanted to make this quick, but it's been ten minutes now, hasn't it?"

And he'd been counting the time.

She didn't have any plans other than heading back home and eating dinner.

But, she really didn't want to be here any longer.

"Umm, Ogiso... I was waiting for your answer..."

"....."

"....."

"....."

"... I see..."

Perhaps the courage she'd mustered up to answer Tomochika's confession was...

Despite being urged to, Setsuna's response was that of silence.

"Sorry, Ogiso... for making you suffer so much."

"....."

And she looked away.

She didn't deny it by saying, *"It's nothing like that"*.

"Well then, I'll be going."

"....."

And she persisted in remaining silent, as a positive affirmation to that.

"Ah, that's right, also..."

"....."

Setsuna had changed.

A part of her changed since her twentieth birthday, just like three years ago.

"It's about, Haruki..."

"....."

She'd lost the kindness she'd equally give everyone.

She'd lost the happy smile she put on for others.

"During this time, he..."

"....."

She'd lost being that *"good girl"* who made anyone happy.

It further damaged the pride of being the eldest daughter of the Ogiso family.

"I take it you're not interested in this either?"

"....."

All she did was pull in others with her own pheromones.

Even so, she'd prick them with the thorns that guarded her.

"Did you guys... really break up?"

"....."

Maybe she might end up making too many enemies like this.

Maybe as a result of being too popular, she might become too hated.

"... never mind, this is probably something you'd hate, Ogiso. Forget it."

"....."

Yes, it was as if Setsunashe had become like Kazusaher best friend in an instant...

"Well then, this time, farew..."

"Wait."

"Eh?"

"Something about, Haruki-kun?"

"....."

This time, Tomochika fell silent.

"What about Haruki-kun?"

"..... pff!"

"Eh, what? What's wrong?"

And then he burst out into laughter.

At the manner and timing with which she asked that question.

"You're cruel, Ogiso."

"... eh?"

But, he knew. No, he knew since the beginning.

How Setsuna would unconsciously treat people so poorly.

"When it's about Haruki, your personality suddenly changes. No matter what you think of other guys, he's the only one on your mind."

"Eh? Eh?"

But Setsuna never expected someone would call her "*cruel*"...

That was the word that she kept cursing Haruki with, so for her to be cursed back with that word, she could only let it stab through her.

"No wonder you're so popular..."

"..... what about Haruki-kun!?"

"... yeah, yeah."

Setsuna had changed.

..... but she didn't want her inner self to change, it would seem.

For better or for worse.

Tomochika had reasons for not coming to university since April.

Well, he had reasons for not coming to the February seminar camp in the first place.

... because they'd finally scheduled surgery to treat his mother's condition.

And it landed right on the day the seminar camp was to set out, and it'd end the following day.

His time, his money, his resolution, and his prospects... there were too many problems that came up. He could only rely on Haruki, who should have felt rather awkward "*on that night*" just like he had.

Haruki came after having talked to him for thirty minutes on the phone.

Like always, he'd keep his cool, run the entire thing, lecture people, egg on Tomochika as if nothing had happened that night, and finally began his work.

First, he helped him prepare for sending his mother to the hospital, dealt with finances, and followed up with the camp.

... in other words, Haruki didn't save Setsuna at the time with the camp.

No matter what circumstances he had, how deep or hopeless they were, that reality was something that could not be swayed.

The surgery was a success, and Haruki returned from the camp the night Tomochika was finally at ease.

Haruki too, was also relieved to hear she pulled through, and then he had to deal with a certain senior who fractured their foot.

Things went well with his mother, and she was finally discharged in the middle of March.

During that time, Haruki also weaved through all his work and came to visit often.

And just like that, Tomochika's wish to see the day his mother fully recovered came closer and closer.

But the two knew that their real fight began right then and there.

The cost of having surgery, being hospitalized, discharged, rehabilitation was

huge...

Even though he could apply for insurance, it was far too expensive, and once Tomochika's tuition fees were included, there was no way for the Tomochika residence to live off just part-time jobs.

Which was why Tomochika had prepared to drop out of university, and search for work.

... but, the one who violently objected to such a noble determination was none other than Haruki.

Haruki lectured him for three days and three nights, valuing Tomochika's abilities, how he took a year to finally enter university, and how it'd be all for naught if he didn't get past this.

Tomochika finally yielded to his stubbornness, and got to work at once.

He looked up every possible scholarship he was eligible for, and endeavored in building fundamentals in his studies.

On top of that, he made a deposit towards his tuition with the money he made from his two jobs, and started a moving job in April.

Of course, Haruki was egging on Tomochika there. Tomochika hadn't been used to such heavy physical work, he felt he might break.

To Tomochika, Haruki was a demon who he'd believe was his benefactor, all in form, manner, and action.

And that continued for about a month.

Just yesterday, the two managed to put together both their earnings for the tuition fees.

And last night, the two truly held a toast to it.

"If not for Haruki, I would have dropped out long ago."

"....."

"There hasn't been a single guy who'd get himself involved like this. Even if they were being paid, they wouldn't go this far."

"....."

"He was the stupidest, most depressing, and the best friend I've ever had."

"....."

Setsuna once again sunk into silence. She turned away her swaying eyes.

"Which was why, he..."

"..... congratulations."

"Ogiso?"

However, this time she had to remain indifferent.

"I'm glad your mother got through... I hope she gets better soon."

"Y-Yeah... thank you. And..."

"Yup, I really do believe it's such a relief. I'm serious, you know?"

"Ogiso..."

"I'm sorry, Tomochika-kun. I fussed over something so small, and made you suffer."

"No, not at all. I just didn't really pay enough attention. And you know..."

"So... I'm going now. I'm really sorry."

Her heart... seemed like it was going to fall apart.

She thought it'd broken since that day in February.

But she was wrong.

She'd blamed everything on him, and was under the impression she was broken.

Because, Haruki didn't do anything wrong. He wasn't the one who was being cruel.

She came to realize the cruel one who was wrong, the other one in this pair...

"Hey, wait a second, Ogiso. I'm not don..."

The reason Setsuna was in despair, was that she was left out from Tomochika's story.

Learning that Haruki did everything for his friend, she was ashamed of detesting him not knowing about the whole thing.

"I'm sorry... please, leave me be..."

Even if she heard of his true strength, and his true values...

Even so, she'd learned she was jealous of Tomochika, and his mother.

"... you're going to regret it if you don't hear this, you know?"

While listening to Tomochika's story, Setsuna was happy, rather vexed, and chewed on her lips.

"There's... nothing more I'd regret..."

Haruki hadn't changed at all.

But at the time, he did prioritize Tomochika more than her.

Hearing about this hopeless situation, she couldn't even have any pride as a woman.

She really was a cruel "woman".

"I told you I was drinking with Haruki last night, didn't I?"

"Please, stop it!"

"He said I'd be able to return to school now. He was happy, like if it was happening to him."

"I said stop it!"

"And... he broke our friendship."

"I'm telling you this isn't something that matters to..... eh?"

"Just wait a second... what are you saying, Haruki?"

"I said, you don't have to pay me back. Just use all of it."

"Wait, that's no good. We're friends, so I have to pay you back..."

"The one who's no good is me... because right now, I'm about to do something horrible to you."

"What is it you're talking about...?"

"Just one punch... let me hit you."

"..... Haruki?"

"Sorry for bringing this up of all times, but I've been holding it back all this time."

"There were many times I would have just blown up, but I endured until your mother's surgery was done."

"I'd delayed it until she was discharged, and until you'd paid off your"

tuition.

So... it's fine now, right? Even if I'm not around, you can figure out what to do, right?

So, it's fine now, right..... don't screw with me, god damn it!!

You fell in love with Setsuna, didn't you!?

You confessed to her right in front of me, didn't you!?

You were going to steal her away from me, weren't you...!?"

"Weren't you avoiding Ogiso?"

"What about that...?"

"Didn't you plan on... breaking up with her?"

"Don't say that like you know what goes on between me and her!"

"Haruki..."

"You see, you see... I betrayed Setsuna.

That's why no matter what, I can't take her. It can't happen.

But, for some other guy to take her... I can't accept that."

"That's really cruel to her, you know?"

"It is! It's cruel!

But, that's how I feel! I couldn't take it anymore!"

"Tomochika, you're a good guy. You're an amazing guy.

I think you're more human than you are my best friend.

I think you'd probably be able to make Setsuna happy.

However, I don't want to see another guy make Setsuna happy right in front of me...!"

"If you have any other problems, just tell me. I'll do what I can.

But, we're no longer friends..... I can't forgive you anymore."

"And, he really did hit me. Left a mark right here."

"....."

"But it looks like he's never punched someone else before, so I think it hurt him more than it hurt me."

".....!"

She gripped both her hands, placing them on top of her knees.

"Looking back, both of us must've looked like crap."

Those clenched fists of hers moved to her thighs, as she gripped even more tightly.

"But, Haruki was real serious. That's why it was a real shock to me too."

But it wasn't to hold back her emotions, but for more pragmatic reasons.

"I really thought he was my best friend. But, he rejected me."

Because, there was a part of Setsuna that she had to hold in far more than her emotions right now.

"However, it's all my fault. So I can't go back."

A part of her she had to hold back that would overflow.

"Anyways, that's how it is... he really cares so much for you, Ogiso..."

"..... I'm sorry..."

"Eh...?"

After all, it throbbed in pain.

"I know it's not enough, but I'm so sorry!"

A reckless and selfish desire for Haruki would wash over her entire body...

Even now it seemed like that desire would flow.

"... you should raise your head soon."

"....."

A man and woman both faced each other, sitting at a coffee shop table by the window.

And the woman had been bowing deeply for quite a while now.

Indeed, this carnage had naturally attracted the attention of all the customers.

"This isn't something you should be apologizing for, Ogiso..."

"No, it's my fault..."

However, Setsuna accepted those gazes that came her way.

"It's my fault that Haruki-kun did something cruel to you..."

"Ogiso..."

"Because I made Haruki-kun do such stupid things, after all..."

— — *It's because I courted another guy, even though I was supposed to be his.*

Yes, because I was his, that wasn't something that could be allowed.

She was so proud of having that attitude of hers, that she didn't feel any kind of gratitude or anything.

"So it's fine if I apologize, right?"

"If you feel satisfied by taking responsibility..."

To the point that her apologizing was ridiculously stupid.

"..... I'm really sorry, okay?"

Setsuna finally looked up.

She glanced a bit upward, a bit mischievously, and smiled in an unreasonably cute way...

A slightly devilish smile from three years ago that was extraordinarily cute.

"Oh man..."

Tomochika was bewildered, seeing this smile since that February night.

Because he knew that charm of hers was something that would eat away at him, even now.

Or rather, there wasn't a single person within the university who didn't know of her.

For *"that"* Ogiso Setsuna to hide such amazing, slightly devilish cuteness of hers.

However, that was something she would only show to a certain someone she loved...

It was like a mirage that he couldn't ever reach himself.

"I'm... really such an idiot, aren't I?"

Kicking her heels at the ground gave a light echo, and in haste Setsuna checked to see if it was okay.

The shoe had just been fixed from being broken last month.

Finding a friend of hers in the neighborhood who ran a shoe store, she spent 1000 yen to have it fixed. Though it was a little different than what it used to be, it was still quite comfortable for her to walk in.

Parting with Tomochika, she'd been walking for ten minutes from the coffee shop to her house.

... though even after thirty minutes had passed, Setsuna had strolled around her own house, taking detours on the way back.

Sometimes she'd be mocking herself, reflecting on herself, and giggle as she slowly walked.

When they parted, Tomochika told her, *"If I can, I'd like to reconcile with Haruki"*.

And Setsuna lightly smiled, answering *"I wish you luck!"* as she quickly turned her back on him.

... perhaps she had completely ignored his need for her to be a mediator for him.

— — I'm sorry.

I'm a cruel girl.

My personality's all messed up.

... because of Haruki-kun.

"... I can tell even my own personality gets all messed up when I talk with you, Kitahara-kun!"

A nostalgic memory from three years ago returned to her, coming from when she still called him *"Kitahara-kun"* and when he still called her *"Ogiso"*.

At the time, she smiled bitterly, sulking with the words, *"She really is cute, if I should say so myself."*

— — Because, I'm happy that you guys broke your friendship.

I'm happy that Haruki-kun got thrown off for my sake.

And like that, Setsuna gave a bitter smile while those words crept up in her mind. If anyone heard them out of context, they'd tremble in such fear.

*— — Haruki-kun grew violent.
He wouldn't be one who would do such a thing.
... it's because of me.
He lost himself when it came to me.*

Perhaps Setsuna really was a true idol.

Because, right now she could give a smile to anyone.

She'd be able to form a smile from the bottom of her heart at any time.

... even if she couldn't even give a care about whoever it was she was smiling to.

Even if she could only think about the one guy who wasn't there.

*— — The only one who can drive him mad...
The only one who can throw him off, is me.
Me, and Kazusa...
That's why I picked him.
That's why I treat him that way.*

She was no longer the "*Setsuna-chan of the Ogiso residence*".

The real Setsuna should have been a girl who was raised well with affection by her parents, as someone who was honest, kind, and could make anyone happy.

*— — Maybe I don't love him. Maybe I don't hate him.
But, I can't be indifferent with him.*

However, it was clear to her that "*it's fine to be cruel now*".

Even if she should hurt other people, she has to protect herself.

Even if she's wrong, this was all all she had.

*— — I'm really so selfish, aren't I...?
I'm not so different from you after all, Kazusa...*

That she could make everyone happy.

That she could make people around her happy.

... that she could make their trio happy.

— —Just kidding... are you angry, Kazusa?

Though, it's not like I meant to say anything wrong, you know?

The two of us can't hold back, can we?

Because she tied herself to the person she liked.

Because she loved him.

And because this was the first time she had a wish she prayed for...

— —Hey, Haruki-kun...

Setsuna continued to walk, looking up at the sky.

At the starry sky that couldn't let snow fall now, blowing with a warm wind.

She only looked up, so that not so much would fall from her eyes.

— —The cruel man who would continue to make me suffer.

Even so, you wouldn't let anyone else make me suffer.

The cowardly man who would never accept me.

Even so, you treat me as if I'm your own thing.

— —I have to tell you, I'm quite popular, you know?

There are so many guys that hit on me, you know?

Even so, you're so stubborn, and so unfaithful.

... no, you wouldn't even look at someone like me.

You would continue to truly show affection for other girls that weren't me.

Even so, you couldn't let go of me, could you...?

And Setsuna finally found the one thing that she hated the most about Haruki.

... even though she tried to hate him so much, and pretty much destroyed it all, she still loves him.

[Edit](#) this section That night, Setsuna had treated herself to something she hadn't had in many months.

It wasn't really something a person would talk of. It wasn't something anyone could show. What this was, went on...

And on.

And on.

- The latter part of this section (Part B2) is quoted from the PS3 version of the game. It is left implicit.

White Album 2 Omake/Story04/Epilogue

May, at the end of the break.

In other words, the following day.

"Ah, good morning Io! Takeya-kun!"

"....."

"....."

"... what's wrong?"

"Umm, we're just a bit surprised."

"With having you say good morning at this time..."

"A-Ahaha..."

... and the time was 12:22 PM.

"Classes only happen for the morning, right?"

"In other words, it's time to head back home."

"A-Ahahahaha..."

Proof of that came from her meeting the two at the campus gates.

It's just that she happened to bump into them as they left.

"What were you doing last night? When did you fall asleep?"

"I-I was just kinda stuck in the holidays. Ended up staying up late, you know!"

There was no way for her to say.

About why it was that she couldn't sleep late at night...

"Though, you do seem quite refreshed now, Setsuna-chan."

"Fueeh!? W-Wait, you could tell...!?"

"Wait, wait, something up? Had something good happen during the holidays?"

"Ah~ during the holidays! Yup, yup, just sleeping from morning until evening!"

"Look, the university idol shouldn't be saying things like that..."

"You can tell us that sort of thing, but if others hear it'll be all over the Internet."

"Ahaha, you're right, ahahahaha!"

What Setsuna did last night was far too shady and suspicious, so the answer

she gave to their normal question ended up particularly tense, and could have been taken in a lot of ways.

However, building up tension naturally like that came from...

"... well, whatever."

"Yeah, whatever, right?"

"... we'll leave it be~"

Setsuna shaking something off.

And from taking a step forward, no matter how small it was.

"Well then, should we all go grab something to eat?"

"Good plan! I haven't eaten anything since this morning."

"That's because you only woke up just now, isn't it?"

It was trivial for the two people, who called themselves her best friends for three years, to see through her.

"Then, let's go... though they're not doing morning service anymore."

"Hey, let's go for Yoneda Coffee! We can stay there for a while if we want!"

"Let's skip that thing with tsubuan^[1] on top, okay?"

Once they finished talking, as always Takeya would take long steps while Io would take quick ones. Not able to begin slowly, the two went into a race.

Whether or not Haruki was here, Setsuna kept her own pacing, taking slow steps from behind, giving a bit of thought as to what to talk about during lunchtime.

Maybe it'd be some things regarding Tomochika from last night.

Maybe it'd be how Haruki was Haruki as always.

Maybe it'd be how it was pretty easy to tell what he'd do.

So maybe she might speak a bit fondly about him.

Maybe it'd be Haruki seeing Takeya as his best friend compared to Tomochika.

Maybe it'd be how Haruki would respond if Takeya confessed to her.

Maybe lunch might be interesting.

Maybe she didn't like speaking fondly of people other than herself...

—Even if it's a love that will not reach...

"!!"

Unconsciously, a melody had almost slipped out of her mouth.

But it vanished the moment it was about to leave.

Which was why in the end, she kept it to herself, so that no one else would hear...

"Just now..."

It was the melody of the standard winter number in the campus.

But it was a melody that she had never sung for the past two years.

She never sang it.

She didn't want to sing it.

And probably, she would never sing it.

But that song oozed out just now, being indulged in just a faint amount of happiness...

—Hey, Haruki-kun.

Which was why Setsuna looked back at the campus gates.

More precisely, at Building 3 up north where she'd gone.

—Hey, Haruki-kun.

You know, I really do like singing.

..... I, really do.

And probably to face the person she thought of.

—The truth is, one day I want to sing again.

And the truth is, I want to be saved.

"He~y, Setsuna-cha~n!"

"What are you doing staring out over there, let's get going~!"

"Ah, oka~y! Wait up~!"

Setsuna started running off.

At a pace different from the pace she'd taken for two years.

— — So I can't give up, I can't give up...

My feelings will definitely reach him.

Even if our bond had been given pause for a moment.

If he himself won't change.

And, if my feelings won't change...'

Setsuna started running off.

Holding herself back, one step at a time, as she moved forward.

— — But right now, I can't sing.

And probably, I won't be saved right away.

But, one day, I'd like my feelings to be set free, along with this song.

So, the moment I sing, will be when he hears me sing.

When... he desires for me to sing.

Until then.

Until, then...

1. [Jump up ↑](#) Tsubuan (粒餡), whole red beans boiled with sugar but otherwise untreated[\[1\]](#)